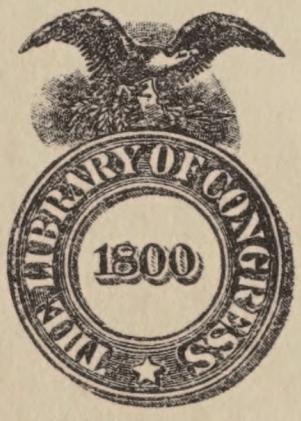


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"I AM NOT ACCUSTOMED TO DEALING WITH BOYS," HE SAID WITH A SNEER

THE BOY TARS of 1812

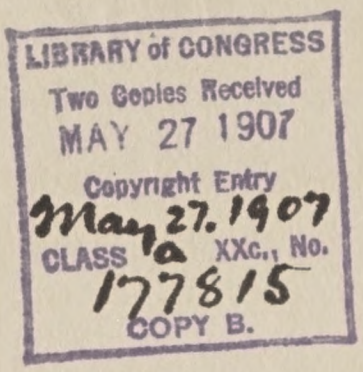
by

John T. McIntyre
Author of
"Fighting King George"
"With John Paul Jones" etc.

Illustrated
by
Clyde O. Deland

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The Boy Tars of 1812

CHAPTER I

THE *SPITFIRE* RUNS FROM THE *GUERRIERE*

"CATO."

"Yes, massa."

"Hand me the glass."

"Heah it am, sah."

The master of White Towers took the telescope from the negro servant and swept the blue waters of the Atlantic; the white capped waves tumbled boisterously toward the Long Island shore, but there was not a sail in sight.

"I wonder what delays the *Spitfire*," said the lad, fretfully, as he handed the glass to the servant once more, "she should have reached here long before this if she sailed on the day intended."

"Yo' can't 'pend on ships, nohow," said the negro, shaking his white head sagely. "When dey is no wind dey jest lays still like

a shif'less niggah, and makes no progress at all. I was a sailor mahsef, Massa Stephen, when I belonged to Massa Jarvis in Souf Carolina, and I knows."

"But the brig has always been fairly prompt before," complained Stephen Randall, drumming nervously upon the window frame; "and now that her coming means something to me, she must needs be two days late."

He turned from the window and paced up and down the oak fitted library with quick, light steps. The young master of White Towers was a slim, delicate looking boy of about eighteen with a sensitive, dark face which now wore a troubled look. The rambling colonial structure known as White Towers lay just below Good Ground, on Long Island; the lands for miles around were a part of the Randall estate. They were under a state of cultivation unusual at that time and the revenues were rich.

"If Roger were only here, Cato," said Stephen as he paced up and down. "If Roger were only here I would not dread the coming of the Marquis so much."

The old black servant approached the boy.

"Don' yo' be skeered ob him, Massa Steve," he said soothingly. "Don' yo' be skeered at all."

"I am not at all afraid of him, myself," said the young man, a trace of pride in his voice. "But you know what his visit means, Cato?"

"I does, massa, I does! It means trouble fo' yo' and fo' all ob us. Dat yeah Glastonbury is a pow'ful bad man; yes sah, pow'ful. He was heah once when yo' fadder was alibe, Massa Steve, sah, and he was just like a white tom-cat, wif his sleek, soft, clean mannahs; he's purring, and he's looking green out ob his eyes at de same time. I don't like dat kind ob pussons, nohow."

"I have never seen this noble cousin of mine," said Stephen, bitterly, "but I have heard of him frequently enough, Cato, as you know."

"Don' yo' be skeered ob him, Massa Steve," said Cato, reassuringly. "De t'ings he say in he lettahs ain't no 'count. 'Membah, yo' is 'dopted a Randall; yo' fadder fit in de Revolution, sah, and yo' can hold yo' head up wif anybody."

The old negro came closer as he spoke, and now laid his hand upon his young master's arm.

"Massa Roger ain't heah yet, but don' yo' feel friendless, sah; yo' fadder bought old Cato outen slavery and made him a free man; and dis niggah will always stan' by yo', 'membah dat, sah!"

Stephen smiled at the old man's earnestness and patted him upon the back.

"Thank you, Cato," he said. "I need friends. This man is more than a match for me; I admit it. He is wise in the ways of the world and has had vast experience of many kinds. I am but a boy, yet, and know but little of real life; my only knowledge has been drawn from these," and he waved his hand toward the books that lined the walls.

"I am eighteen; he is more than forty. My entire life has been passed at school or here at White Towers. He has commanded armies, Cato, and stands high at court; his iron will has conquered a wilderness in the north and subjugated peoples who never knew submission before. What chance have I against such a man as that?"

"Yo' fadder done gone made no will, Massa Steve, to be suah, sah; and dis yeah Glastonbury man is de nex' ob kin; but dey is a law in dis state, sah: and he can't do jest as he likes, nohow. Dese English ain't so mighty popular in dis country jest now, as all dat."

The words of old Cato were true. The British were not at all popular in the United States in the year 1811, and apparently had no desire to be so. Upon every possible occasion the officers of British ships made it their business to express the utmost contempt for the young republic; the rights of Americans upon the high seas were held as nothing; from port to port American seamen were hunted by British press-gangs; they were seized in the streets of foreign cities and upon the decks of American vessels flying the Stars and Stripes. Protestations were laughed at; every man speaking the English tongue was considered a British subject; and the impressed sailors were condemned to virtual slavery upon British cruisers and ships of the line.

This had been going on for years, and the

government at Washington seldom raised its voice. There was scarcely any navy; the treasury was all but bare; the nation was still in its infancy; and the Jefferson administration felt that it would be madness to make a stand against the Goliath of the seas, hoping to put an end to the existing condition by means of diplomacy.

This was the attitude the British had anticipated. They were then grappling with Napoleon in that last desperate struggle; and while their ships were numerous enough to sweep the French from the sea, they were slimly manned. To remedy this the impressment of Americans was redoubled; British frigates swaggered up and down the American coast; they prowled about and waited at the mouths of ports for the outcoming of merchantmen, and then boarded and stripped them of their crews.

But gradually the people of the states grew angry; at first they had been disposed to let the authorities at Washington deal with these matters in their own way and in their own good time. But as months passed and no steps were taken to stop the enslaving of American tars,

the subdued indignation grew hot and active; the nation began to seethe and rumble like a volcano about to roar its fury in the face of the world.

The people began to remember the wanton firing into a little American sloop by the British ship *Leander* off Sandy Hook; they also recalled the broadsides poured by the *Leopard*, fifty guns, into the helpless American frigate *Chesapeake*; and the taking from her of three colored seamen, proved to be Americans. The merchants of Massachusetts and elsewhere sneered at this feeling as mere sentiment; they pointed to the fact that the growing commerce of the nation would be ruined in the event of war; but the people and the men of the navy paid no heed to this selfish outcry; they had been as patient as it was possible for a people to be; and now the time was fast approaching when they would show their resentment and redress the wrongs that had been done them.

Young Stephen Randall was well acquainted with the insults which his country had undergone at the hands of the British; his foster father had been in the war office at Washing-

ton under both Mr. Adams and Mr. Jefferson; he had served in the Revolution as colonel of a New York regiment, and was regarded by all as deeply learned in the art of war. Moreover, he was thought to have studied fortification and coast defense as no other man in the country at that time had done.

Only a month before he had breathed his last at White Towers, the public prints of the time, lamenting the loss to the country; for while he had finished his plans for the defense of the Atlantic seaboard, he had not had time to complete the actual work itself.

Stephen's mind was full of thoughts of his father as he paced moodily up and down. Suddenly an exclamation from the old negro servant aroused him.

"Look dar, Massa Steve," cried Cato. "Dar's de *Spitfire*, jest as suah as yo' lib!"

Stephen sprang to the window, and his dark eyes swept the wide expanse of water. A fair sized brig was in the offing; she had all sail set and was bounding along toward the little bay a short distance below White Towers.

"It's the *Spitfire*, sure enough!" cried

Stephen, joyfully. "But, see there! what makes her act so strangely?"

The smart little craft had suddenly spun upon her keel, so to speak, headed to sea, and went racing away with the blue water piling up under her bows in ridges capped with foam.

"Dat yeah ain't Massa Roger's style, at all, sah," said Cato, regarding the eccentric vessel with astonished eyes. "He don't play no monkey shines wif he ship. Somefing wrong, sah!" with conviction.

"But what can be wrong? There are no shallows in the bay, as Roger knows very well; there is nothing the matter with the brig herself," then after a long look through the glass, "It must be the wind, though it's no more than brisk."

Cato wagged his head, and hobbled along after his young master, who had sprung out upon the wide lawn and began making his way down toward the beach.

"They ain't no wind dat ever blowed dat could keep Mars' Roger outen de bay if he wanted to come in," said he, wisely. "Dat yeah boy is a borned sailor, sah! Take mah

word fo' it, dey's somefin' mo' den we can see in dis, mars'."

The brig, as they watched, suddenly changed her course once more; a ball of bunting now shot up to her mast-head, and, unrolling, displayed the Stars and Stripes, which streamed bravely in the breeze. Stephen Randall uttered a cry and clutched Cato by the arm.

"There can only be one explanation for that," he cried. "Pursuit!"

"By de British!" said Cato, bringing his broad, black palms together with a ringing slap. "And deah dey come!"

Following the suddenly-pointed finger of the negro, Stephen saw a sight that filled him with incredulous amazement. From around a small headland, which up to this time had concealed her from his sight, came a large British frigate of more than thirty guns; across her foretopsail was painted in huge black letters the name, *Guerrière.*

"It's that bully, Pechell, and his blustering crew!" said Stephen, after a moment's silent wonder. "And he's in chase of the *Spitfire!*"

"He nebber catch de brig!" cried Cato.

"She's de smartest sailer in dese waters. She'll run from him like a ghost."

"She might run from the frigate," answered Stephen, "but she can't run from her guns. See, the bow gun is being trained upon her now."

As he spoke there came a flash, a puff of smoke, and a dull report from the bow of the *Guerrière*; and then the *Spitfire* lay to like a frightened stag, her sails coming down, her crew running to and fro upon her decks.

CHAPTER II

THE IMPRESSMENT OF JOHN DEGUYO

As he saw the solid shot from the bow gun of the *Guerrière* go dipping from wave to wave across the path of the brig, Stephen Randall darted away toward the shores of the little bay.

The boy had no idea what he intended to do when he started; but there was a catboat there which he had been sailing earlier in the day, and the mast of which had not yet been unstepped. Into this he leaped and pushed off; the sail went up like a flash, bellied in the breeze and sent the little craft dancing seaward.

"Mars' Steve! Mars' Steve!" came the voice of Cato as he toiled along toward the water's edge. But the boy's eyes were directed eagerly under his boom to where he could see a boat being lowered from the British frigate, and he paid no heed to the imploring voice of the old man.

As he came racing out of the bay, Stephen's catboat came almost abreast of the frigate's gig.

"Ahoy!" cried the startled lieutenant in command. "Sheer off, there!"

Stephen paid no attention, but swept by on his way to the brig.

"Ahoy," thundered the now angry officer. "Do you hear, Yankee? Throw that old fish-box out of the wind or I'll send a shot after you."

Stephen cast him a defiant glance from over his shoulder, but held his little craft on her course. The lieutenant leaned forward from his seat in the stern, leveled a wide-mouthed pistol, and fired. The movement of the boat spoiled his aim, however, and the ball whistled over the lad's head and through the sail. The boy's cheeks paled a trifle, for he was unaccustomed to anything of this sort, his life having been a quiet one. But his eyes flashed and his jaw set itself resolutely. From wave to wave bounded the catboat; her bow still pointed to the brig; the hand at her rudder was firm and steady.

The enraged British lieutenant seized an-

other pistol, and once more the crash of exploding powder sounded across the waters. The brawny tars at the oars of the gig bent their backs to their tasks; but long before they had shipped their sweeps at the side of the *Spitfire*, the catboat was tied to her bow chains and Stephen had reached her deck.

"Roger!" he cried, as he sprang over the rail.

"Steve!" came an answering cry, and a tall, bronzed youth in the dress of an officer in the merchant service, was at his side in a moment and clasping his hand.

"Roger, what does all this mean?" asked Stephen Randall. "I saw that frigate send a solid shot across your bow, and came out to you at once."

"It's another outrage of the British," answered Roger Dare, master of the *Spitfire*. He spoke bitterly, and his eyes snapped as he glanced over the side and saw the frigate's gig making fast. "It's another press-gang, I suppose; and this time in the waters of New York. If this continues, householders will not be safe in the big cities."

The lieutenant in command of the gig

came over the rail as these last words were being spoken; he was a young man, but with a harsh, forbidding look, and a scar across one side of his face.

"If the householders are British subjects and deserters from his Majesty's navy, who knows!" spoke he as he stood with his legs wide apart, his arms akimbo, his cutlass trailing at his heels. "Now, then, who is skipper here?"

"I am," replied Roger Dare.

The British officer surveyed him from top to toe with cold disdain.

"I am not accustomed to dealing with boys," said he, with a sneer. "And who trusted you with a ship, my lad, may I ask?"

"The brig is my own," replied the youthful captain. "And, perhaps, sir, after you have been at sea as long as I, you, too, will command a ship."

The officer flushed, and his hand went unconsciously to the hilt of his sword.

"I will have no sharp answers from you, my hearty," he rapped out. "Muster your crew on the main deck."

"Why should I?" asked Roger coolly. He stood up very straight, and his keen blue eyes looked the lieutenant in the face with never a quaver.

"Because I order you," exclaimed the other, angrily. Then he strode to the rail and called out, "Below there! On deck, all of you."

The gig's crew came tumbling nimbly upon the *Spitfire's* deck, and lined up behind their officer with pistol, cutlass and pike held in readiness for instant use. The lieutenant's eyes then swept the deck and noted a gray-haired seaman standing aft.

"Ahoy, bos'n!" he cried. "Pipe all hands."

The old seaman touched his hat, but answered boldly:

"If the skipper orders it, sir."

"Let it be enough for you that I order it," stormed the British officer. He took one angry step toward the old bos'n; but he felt a strong grip laid upon his shoulder, and was whirled around like a top.

"You forget, sir," said the quiet voice of Roger Dare, "that you do not stand upon your own deck just now, but upon that of an

American brig and in American waters. If the crew is to be piped, I shall give the command, and not the first blustering king's man that chooses to board my craft."

"Let go," said the officer, his face livid with passion. "Let go!"

He was a hardy man, and a strong one; and he struggled to free himself as he spoke. But the powerful fingers of the young American sailor closed upon him like iron. Seeing himself powerless, the officer cried:

"Cut him down, men, and clear the decks!"

As the tars of the *Guerrière* sprang forward, Roger Dare suddenly presented a large brass-barreled pistol in their faces.

"Stop, men!" he shouted, with anger in his eyes and voice. "I'll shoot the first of you that lifts a hand."

The seamen halted, hesitating; and just then the lieutenant wrenched himself free.

"You Yankee hound!" he shouted, as he drew his blade and sprang at the young captain of the *Spitfire*. The keen steel whistled through the air, but Roger Dare stooped under it; the next instant his clinched fist caught

the maddened officer between the eyes and the man fell to the deck like a log.

Once more, seeing the fall of their officer, the British boarding party sprang forward; but this time they were met by the half dozen tars that made up the company of the *Spitfire*. These had belaying pins, sheath knives or any other weapon that came to their hands at the moment. Another instant would have seen a clash between the opposing seamen, but there came a thundering hail that startled everybody.

"Look!" cried Stephen Randall, grasping Roger's arm and pointing to the leeward of the brig. "The frigate!"

The dark hull of the *Guerrière* seemed to tower above the little *Spitfire;* her quarter-deck was thronged with officers, her rails and rigging with men; through her open ports grinned the black muzzles of her heavy guns, all sweeping the decks of the brig.

"Lay down your arms," thundered a great voice from the frigate's quarter-deck. "Lay down your arms or I'll sink you."

From his position on the *Spitfire*, the young captain could see the gunners of the *Guerrière*

standing at their pieces with lighted matches in their hands; then his eye ran over his little crew, which faced the danger so dauntlessly at his back. To resist would have been madness, and so he gave the word that placed his vessel in the hands of the boarding party to do with as they would.

"You Yankee swine," panted the lieutenant, who had, in the meantime clambered to his feet. He was breathless with rage and his hand trembled as he shook his finger in the face of the young commander of the brig. "I'll have your life for that blow."

"Let us have no idle bandying of words," said Roger, coolly, his gaze level with the stormy looks of the enraged Englishman. "If you have any business with me, set about it at once, as I have business in the port of New York and cannot lay to here very long with any profit to myself or my cargo."

"Pipe all hands," commanded the British lieutenant.

"The entire ship's company is upon deck already," said Roger, after a rapid glance.

"All?"

"Every man."

"Is there no one else upon the brig?"

"One passenger."

"We will have him upon deck, too, if you please."

Word was passed below, and in a few moments a dark, well dressed man stepped from the companionway. His eyes, heavy with sleep, grew big with surprise as he caught sight of the armed men, the angry officer and the menacing frigate.

"What is the matter, Captain Dare?" he inquired.

"I am boarded by a British boat's crew, Mr. Deguyo," answered Roger, bitterly. "And you were required to come upon deck."

Then turning to the officer in command, the young skipper continued,

"And now, sir, what next?"

"You shall see," returned the other.

The crew of the brig were lined up along the rail, and the British officer went from one to the other asking questions. This was the usual mode; when the leader of a press-gang found an American who hesitated in the least in his answers, they at once seized him, claiming him as a British deserter who was en-

deavoring to evade a direct question as to his identity. But, as it happened, the entire crew of the *Spitfire* were so unquestionably Yankees in appearance and accent, and gave such prompt and humorous replies, that even the surly questioner could find no excuse to "press" any of them. With an angry snarl, the lieutenant turned away; as he did so, his eyes rested upon the dark face of John Deguyo, who stood talking animatedly with Roger and Stephen across the deck.

"Here you, sirrah," cried the baffled officer, striding forward. "Give an account of yourself."

John Deguyo looked at him in surprise.

"I do not quite understand," said he, mildly.

"Come, none of that! You understand very well. I am here to take deserters of our service out of this Yankee. Your name and history?"

"My name is John Deguyo; I am an American citizen of the town of Plymouth, and a passenger upon this brig to New York."

"You have the look of an Englishman," said the leader of the boat's crew, regarding

the man from under lowering brows. "And I think I've seen you in a British ship, somewhere."

"Never, sir," replied Mr. Deguyo, with indignation.

"Don't answer me, sir!" roared the lieutenant. "Back you go into the service of your country; and we'll see if the cat will not teach you that deserting is not the thing for an Englishman to be guilty of."

"But I am not an Englishman! I am an American. Let go," as two brawny sailors grasped him by the arms.

"Let go," cried Roger Dare, menacingly, as he leaped upon the seamen. Stephen and the crew of the brig were at his back; ready weapons flashed in the sunlight; in another moment a struggle to the death would have been precipitated, but John Deguyo was a man of peace and protested:

"Captain Dare, let there be no blood shed in my behalf. If I am taken on board that ship yonder, by force, and against my will, the government at Washington will take the matter in hand."

The British lieutenant laughed harshly.

"If you wait for your government to protest, and make the protest strong enough for it to be heeded, you will wait until old age overtakes you, my man," said he, with a sneer.

As he spoke, his eyes ran over the angry party opposed to him; but Roger had seen the folly of a struggle with the man-of-war's men even as his passenger spoke, and restrained his men. However, he said to the "pressed" man:

"You are my passenger, Mr. Deguyo, and I am responsible for your safety while you are on board my craft. If you object in the least to allowing this matter to proceed farther, or fear that our government will not come promptly to your aid, as this man," pointing to the lieutenant, "suggests, I and my crew are ready to protect you to the last drop of our blood."

"I thank you," said John Deguyo, gratefully. "But I can see that a fight would only waste lives uselessly. You and your little crew are no match for these ruffians."

"Into the gig with him," cried the lieutenant, angrily. "We'll teach him to guard his

bitter tongue after he's been lashed to a grating a few times and given a couple of dozen with the cat."

As they dragged him to the side of the brig, John Deguyo called to Roger:

"I ask you, Captain Dare, to carry the news of my seizure to the proper authorities. Will you do this for me?"

"I will," cried Roger, springing forward to grasp the prisoner's hand. The lieutenant endeavored to prevent this, but the flash in the young skipper's eye, and the sudden flexing of his supple muscles, caused the man to shrink back immediately, for all his blustering air. "I will carry your message to Washington," continued Roger; "my ship and myself are at your service for this work."

"I thank you," said John Deguyo as he was forced over the rail and into the frigate's gig. "And unless I am very much mistaken, your story will result in a bitter reckoning with those who armed and sent this frigate out to prey upon those too weak to defend themselves."

The oars dipped into the water as he uttered the last words; and Roger and Stephen,

as they leaned upon the bulwarks, watching the boat as it drew near the *Guerrière*, wondered if the impressed man had not spoken with the voice of prophecy.

CHAPTER III

THE *LITTLE BELT* APPEARS IN THE OFFING

When the top-masts of the British man-of-war dipped below the horizon, the brig was brought about and slowly worked into the little bay which harbored all vessels having business with the great Randall estate. After she had reached a safe anchorage, Roger ordered a boat lowered and manned, and, taking the catboat in tow, they went ashore.

"The *President*, forty-four, with Commodore Rodgers in command, is now, so I have heard, lying off Fort Severn at Annapolis," Roger had said to his friend while the *Spitfire* was entering. "After you have gone over this matter of yours and we have decided upon something to do, I'll make sail for Annapolis and report this new outrage."

There was a vast difference between the two boys as they walked up the well kept road toward White Towers. Roger was nineteen, only a year Stephen's senior; but his power-

ful figure, bronzed face, clear, bold eye and easy bearing stamped him as of another type from the delicate young student with his dark, sensitive face and serious eyes. But there was no gainsaying the friendship between them; and none to look at them would fail to note the tendency of Stephen to rely upon his stronger friend, or that of Roger to offer his strength generously.

As has been seen, Stephen was an adopted son of Colonel Randall. A close friend of the colonel's, a naval officer who was killed in the war with Tripoli, had been Stephen's father; and the veteran of the Revolution, who was unmarried, at once took the boy, then at school, and reared him as his own.

It was at school at Boston that the two boys met. Roger Dare was the son of a sea captain who had retired, years before, and had taken to the building of ships on one of the Maine rivers; the boy had loved the blue waters always, and upon his reaching a sufficient age, his father had entrusted him with the brig he now sailed, and finally turned it over to him entirely, as master and owner. He had engaged in the coasting trade, sailing

from the New England ports into New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore; and there was never a trip that he did not drop anchor for a few hours at Good Ground, that he might speak with Stephen.

Well upon two hours had elapsed since Stephen had hoisted the sail of the catboat and raced out to the *Spitfire*; so now he turned anxiously to Cato, who had met them upon the shore, and was trudging along behind them.

"Has any one arrived, Cato?" asked the boy.

"No, Mars' Steve; lestways, not that I knows on."

"He may, even now, be at White Towers," said Stephen to Roger, and the latter detected a note of dread in his voice.

"What matter," said the stalwart young sailor, lightly. "As he seems bound to pay you a visit, he may as well come to-day as to-morrow, or next day. The Marquis of Glastonbury is a rather formidable personage, from all accounts, but you have no occasion to fear him, Steve."

"It's not fear, Roger," protested Stephen.

"If he came as an open enemy I would know how to receive him. But he comes as a friend —as the sole living relative of my dead benefactor; it is the thought that White Towers might fall into his hands that unnerves me, Roger. I could not bear to see the dear old place pass into the possession of such as he!"

"He is not a very good man, I know," said Roger Dare. "But, if the stories that I have heard of him be true, he is a very brave and very enterprising one."

He paused and placed his hands upon Stephen's shoulders, in the manner of an elder brother, and looked him in the face.

"Steve," said the youthful captain of the brig *Spitfire*, "I'm going to ask you some questions."

"I am ready to answer any that you care to put to me," returned the other.

"Very well, then. Now, you love White Towers, don't you?"

"I do."

"And you would not care to leave it?"

"I would not."

"It is," and Roger's eyes swept the beautifully-kept lawns, trim orchards and wide

fields, green with the first up-springings of May, "a very beautiful place. And it is, I think, worth a great deal of money."

Stephen was silent, and made no answer.

"Your adopted father, Colonel Randall," proceeded Roger, "had much land in other places, I've heard; and also a very great deal of wealth of various sorts—shipping, timber, securities and many other things."

"Yes," said Stephen, briefly.

"Pardon me for what I am going to say," went on Roger Dare, his steady blue eyes fixed upon his friend's face, "but to get at the real state of your feeling toward this man, I feel that I must say it."

"Go on," said Stephen, in surprise.

"Is it because you desire Colonel Randall's money for yourself that you fear the Marquis?"

"Roger!" Stephen sprang back a pace and grew a little pale. "You did not think so meanly as that of me, surely!"

"Steve," and the young sailor advanced a step, once more laying his hands upon his young friend's shoulders, "you know that I do not believe this of you. But I asked the

question merely to show you how others, who do not know you so well, might regard your attitude in this matter. There is something behind all this. It is not your nature to dread any man or anything."

"Come into the house," said the other, after a pause. His face was troubled and his eyes were full of appeal; the bolder spirit of Roger Dare softened as he noted the evident agitation of his comrade of many happy days, and he threw one strong arm across his shoulders.

"Don't tell me if you'd rather not, Steve," he said. "But if there is anything that I can help you in, just give it a name."

When they reached the library, Stephen closed the door and motioned Roger to a seat.

"I have been searching the horizon for you, day and night for a week past, Roger," he said, also seating himself, "and there was not a moment in all that time that I was not wishing that you were here, that I might tell you all about this thing that worries me so much."

"Heave ahead, then, my hearty," said the young commander of the *Spitfire* as he crossed

his legs and became all attention. "Here I am."

"The estate is a great one," began Stephen, "and I love White Towers. Colonel Randall desired that I come into all that he left; he said so many times, to myself and to others; but for all that he died without a will."

"So you have already told me," said Roger.

"The Marquis of Glastonbury is a sort of distant cousin of my father—or of Colonel Randall, as I suppose I'd better call him. He has come to New York to lay claim to the estate; and though Colonel Randall desired me to have it, I would willingly give it up to his relative without a word, were it not for one thing."

"Ah."

"Almost the entire work upon the plans for our seaboard defense was done here at White Towers; I assisted in some of the work, but a great deal of it was secret, and the colonel worked upon it alone. You can imagine the importance he attached to this portion of the work, when I tell you that the key to it was drawn up in cipher, in order to

reduce to a minimum the possibility of its becoming known. This cipher is, of course, in possession of the war department; but, two weeks ago, two officers came here from Washington in a state of great alarm. It had been discovered that a copy existed—they had come upon this fact during a search of Colonel Randall's papers in the department, after his death. He had drawn it up and secreted it at White Towers, fearing that some accident might happen to the original."

"I am beginning to see," said Roger Dare, leaning across the table, at which they sat, toward his friend. "Go on."

"Somehow," said Stephen, in a troubled tone, "the existence of this copy of the cipher has leaked out. The British minister at Washington learned of it; and almost immediately afterward I received word from the Marquis of Glastonbury that he had resolved to contest my claim to White Towers, and also that he proposed to pay me a visit."

"What is the purpose of the visit?"

"I do not know; but I presume that he will come to sound me as to my knowledge of the whereabouts of the cipher."

"Does he suppose for a moment that you would tell him anything you know?"

"Not willingly or consciously. But a man like the Marquis has many ways of doing a thing. His visit is in regard to the defenses of the Atlantic seaboard. I feel assured of that."

"Then, in your opinion, his claim to the estate is but a secondary thing with him?"

"Exactly. It is mainly an excuse for him to come here, to gain possession for a time perhaps to ransack White Towers from attic to cellar for the missing cipher-key."

"I rather think you are right," said Roger Dare.

Just then the sound of a light gun brought them both to their feet, and to one of the library windows.

"The *Guerrière's* returned," cried Stephen, as he caught sight of a vessel, flying the British colors, in the offing.

"No," said Roger, "this craft is a sloop-of-war, or what the English call a corvette. She is ship-rigged like the *Guerrière*, but only carries one tier of guns."

As they watched, the gangway was let down at the side and a boat lowered.

"Some important person is to come ashore, it seems," said Stephen, with interest.

"Yes," answered the commander of the *Spitfire* as he caught sight of a figure upon the deck of the corvette, ready to descend, "and it would not surprise me at all if it were your expected visitor, the noble Marquis of Glastonbury."

CHAPTER IV

THE MARQUIS OF GLASTONBURY COMES ASHORE

Two men descended the gangway that had been let down at the side of the corvette. It would have been an easy matter indeed for any active man to have sprung from the bulwarks into the boat; but it was plain to be seen that the foremost of these never dreamed of doing such a thing. He stepped delicately into the long boat and carefully dusted a seat in the stern, after which he sank into it gracefully. The other man was not nearly so fastidious; and when he, too, was seated, the boat pushed off and pulled shoreward with the long, hearty British man-of-war stroke.

"It is the Marquis, beyond a doubt," said Roger, with a laugh. "I've often heard of his being a great dandy and foppish in the extreme."

Stephen said nothing; his face had become noticeably paler, and the hand that rested upon his friend's arm trembled.

"Don't allow his coming to affect you so strongly," proceeded Roger, encouragingly. "He has not yet found the copy of the cipher, remember. And he is not likely to do so."

"I know that," said Stephen. "I have had some weeks and a free hand to search for it, yet have been unable to discover anything that even looked like it."

"Have you been all over the house?" asked Roger, with a curious emphasis.

"Yes," answered his friend, "I have been rummaging in every corner of it."

"White Towers is a queer old place," said Roger. "Do you remember what we found that summer afternoon, five years ago?"

Stephen flashed his friend a startled look.

"The underground passage!" exclaimed he. "Why, I never thought of that."

"It leads down to the bay; and I've always thought that it had some use at one time or another. And another thing: I have also fancied that it was not the only queer thing about this house."

"What do you mean?" asked Stephen, anxiously.

"Perhaps I was day dreaming, but I more than once, during that summer we just spoke of, thought I caught a hollow ring in some of the walls."

"You never spoke of it before."

"I did, at the time; but you laughed at me, and so I thought no more about it."

"Now that you mention it, I have a faint recollection of your having said something of the kind. But there are many old colonial houses with secret ways in their walls and under their gardens; there is nothing so strange about White Towers being of the same sort, even if your fancy proved true."

"It was not mere oddness that I had in mind," said Roger, quietly. "But if White Towers contains secret rooms and passages, who knows but what Colonel Randall was fully acquainted with them, and what more likely place for him to secrete his copy of the cipher."

Stephen caught his breath at this. It was very evident that the thought had occurred to him also, before Roger spoke; but his friend's putting it into words brought the possibility of the thing vividly before him.

"You may be right," he breathed excitedly, a color coming into his cheeks and his eyes burning. "It is the most likely thing in the world."

"If the secret places exist," said Roger Dare, coolly, "it is likely enough. But we do not as yet know for a certainty that they do. However, let us put all this aside for the time; let us think of the Marquis, for, see, his boat has poked her nose up on the sand."

This was true; the boat from the British corvette had landed its passengers upon the sand, and they were making their way toward White Towers.

"Who is the second person, I wonder?" said Roger, as they watched the approach of the two.

"It seems to me," answered Stephen, gazing intently toward the newcomers, "that I should know him. He has a familiar look, but at this distance I cannot quite make him out."

In a few moments, however, the men had drawn near enough for their faces to be plainly seen. And then Stephen uttered an exclamation of astonishment and clutched Roger by the arm.

"It is Ravenac!" he cried.

"Ravenac?" questioned Roger.

"Yes; he was once employed by Colonel Randall as secretary, but was dismissed very suddenly for some act of dishonesty."

"Oh, yes, I remember! It was in regard to the colonel's work?" said Roger.

"It was."

"Then Ravenac was the source of the British minister's information. In some way he knew of the existence of the copy of the cipher key—who knows, perhaps he is aware of its hiding place at this moment."

Stephen grew as pale as death; the thought of such a thing frightened him. He was a spirited boy enough, as he had proved only that day in his run out to the *Spitfire;* but his delicate nerves were easily disturbed, especially when he was startled suddenly, as was the case now.

The two men approached the house and paused at the foot of the wide stone steps that led up to the main door of White Towers.

"You had better go out to receive them," said Roger.

"No, no," cried the other boy, hastily,

shrinking back. "I could not do it, Roger, not now!" Then he added pleadingly, "You go for me."

Roger Dare understood the timid nature of his friend, and realized how the responsibility of this matter must have weighed upon him in the last few weeks.

"Very well," said he, "but you must not let the coming of these men discompose you so. You'll need all your presence of mind to beat them, before we are done, I think."

As he finished he stepped through the low window and advanced to the head of the flight of steps. At sight of him, the man whom Stephen had called Ravenac spoke a few quick words in the ear of the other, who darted at Roger a swift look of inquiry from the keenest and coldest eyes the boy had ever seen.

"Gentlemen, good afternoon," said the young captain of the brig, in a quiet, even tone.

"This is White Towers?" asked the stranger with the keen eyes.

"It is."

"I am desirous of seeing that person who

calls himself Stephen Randall," spoke the man, as he flecked some specks of dust from his highly glazed boots with a spotless handkerchief.

"There is a person here whom the laws of New York call Stephen Randall," said Roger, in the same even voice. "Perhaps it is he whom you mean."

"Ah!" The stranger raised a glass to his eyes and surveyed the speaker with cold disdain. "And may I ask to whom I am speaking?"

"I am a friend of the master of White Towers," answered Roger.

"And his spokesman, it would seem," with a sneer.

"You are the Marquis of Glastonbury, I take it," said Roger, unruffled by the other's manner.

"You have been correctly informed by your young friend, whom I fancy I see at the window. And this," indicating the other man, "is Monsieur Ravenac."

"I have heard of the gentleman," replied Roger, as his blue eyes swept the man's tall, black clad figure from head to foot. "And few

things I have heard of him have been to his credit, believe me."

The Marquis of Glastonbury furrowed his smooth brow; but in an instant the frown was gone, and his fine teeth shone in a sudden smile. He lifted his white, bell crowned beaver hat and bowed with a pleased look.

"You are quick of tongue," said he, approvingly. "It is a quality that I admire much in youth. It promises an alert mind."

The sudden alteration in his manner took Roger by surprise. But an instant later he understood. Seeing that nothing was to be gained by his naturally sneering and mocking manner, the Marquis had resorted to that sauve politeness and polished flattery that had no doubt served him well upon many occasions.

As he stood there, bowing and smiling winningly, he presented a figure of elegance, grace and ease such as the young sailor had never seen before. His garments fitted him faultlessly, and were of the very latest fashion; his stock and shirt frill were immaculate. And he was a man of distinguished bearing; there was a polish in his manner common to

the noted dandies of the time: in his face were the lurking lines that showed the fearless, ruthless soldier of the Canadian wilds, the subtle diplomat whose ready mastery of details, and adroit skill in the manipulation of men and things had gained many notable victories in the courts of Europe.

"I am most pleased with this place," continued the Marquis of Glastonbury. "It is very beautiful, and the house itself reminds me much of those old manors which one meets with in the English midlands."

"And it is fully as queer as any of them," spoke Ravenac, meaningly.

The Marquis darted him a swift, threatening look; then he turned to Roger and said in his most polished tones:

"Mr. Randall is at home, is he not? and can we not see him?"

"Will you come into the library?" asked Roger. He opened the great doors and stood waiting until the others had passed in. Then he closed them and led the way to the room where Stephen was awaiting them, pale of face, but more composed than Roger could have hoped for.

"I received your letter some days ago," said Stephen, after Roger had made the Marquis known to him formally, "and I was surprised at your claim, sir."

"No doubt," smiled the Englishman. He settled himself back more comfortably in one of the big library chairs and crossed his legs gracefully. "But Colonel Randall was a connection of mine, you know; in point of fact I am the only person alive who could claim kinship with him. And as he left no will, why, under the law, I fancy the estate comes to me."

"It was the colonel's desire that I should have it," said Stephen.

"I would not question your word," replied the other affably. He took a gold snuff-box from his pocket and tapped the lid with one white forefinger; then he offered it to the boys, who declined. "Oh, you don't do anything like this. Well, you are over-young, of course." He took a delicate pinch, replaced the box and brushed his snowy frill for any stray grains. "But my kinsman dying intestate leaves the matter open to controversy."

"I hardly think there is any doubt about the colonel's intentions," spoke Roger Dare. "That he intended willing his estate to Stephen is well known to many."

The eyes of the Marquis narrowed and hardened. Roger saw his well kept hands clinch about the arms of the chair upon which he sat; but when he spoke, the man's voice was as soft and as suave as ever.

"I had hoped for a private discussion of this matter," said he, addressing himself to Stephen. "But, of course it makes no great difference."

"This is my friend," said the young master of White Towers, placing his hand upon Roger's shoulder. "I have no secrets of any sort from him."

"It always pleases me to see strong friendships," remarked the Englishman, gazing at them through his glass with eyes that seemed to take in their every quality. Then he changed his tone to one very brisk and business-like:

"My solicitors have assured me that I have an almost certain case. But I dislike going to law."

"The law," said Ravenac, "is a bad thing to become entangled in."

It was the first time that he had spoken since entering the house. Unlike the Marquis he had not seated himself, but stood beside the table around which the others had gathered; his tall, stoop-shouldered figure, his dead black attire, his sharp, white, large-featured face gave him the appearance of a giant raven.

"It is, my good Ravenac," answered the Marquis with a nod of the head. "The law is a very bad thing, indeed. And now," to Stephen, "you know that my claim is a good one. Your own solicitors must have told you so, if you have consulted them in the matter. But it is my intention, for all that, to be very easy with you."

Roger saw that the Marquis was about to unfold the proposition with which he had come to White Towers; he leaned his chin upon his hands and bent over the table, an intent expression upon his face.

"As I remarked to Mr. Dare," went on the nobleman, again delicately taking snuff, "this old house pleases me. I have long desired to be the owner of one just like it, near New

York. Let us compromise our little affair. The Randall estate is very great; but I will be most generous. Take all—but give me White Towers."

The Marquis waved his hand after the manner of a man who does a gracious thing; and he smiled and showed his fine teeth. The eyes of Ravenac were fixed upon Stephen's face, hungrily, intently.

Roger pressed his friend's foot beneath the table, and they exchanged quick looks. The purpose of Glastonbury was plain to them. He desired to gain possession of White Towers, as Stephen had said, in order that he might have an uninterrupted opportunity to search for the hidden key to the cipher that would mean so much in the event of war with Great Britain.

"Come," said the Marquis, smilingly, "what do you say? You did not expect such an offer, I dare say."

"On the contrary," said Roger Dare, "that was just about what was expected."

Once more the keen eyes of the Englishman narrowed and hardened. "I don't quite understand," he said.

"Perhaps not," said Roger, his steady blue eyes meeting the glances of the other boldly. "But there are reasons—perhaps you'd call them sentimental—why my friend does not care to give up White Towers."

"I should much prefer to hear your friend upon the matter," said the Marquis, coldly.

"What Mr. Dare has just said is a fact," said Stephen. He was pale of face still, and now his voice trembled slightly; but his determination was plain. This the man saw immediately, and asked:

"You are fixed in this, are you?"

"I am," firmly.

"My proposition is a very generous one."

"I cannot and will not give up White Towers."

The Marquis arose; all his suavity and charm of manner was gone.

"Very well," he said, harshly. "We shall see about your 'will not,' my boy. I am a man to whom compromise does not appeal, as a rule, but because of your years I preferred to make this offer." He took up his hat, smoothed it carefully for a moment, and then continued: "Come, Ravenac."

At the door he paused, while Cato held it very wide open for him.

"As it is to be war between us, Master Randall," said he, "it may be only fair to tell you that in the far north we seldom show quarter."

"I hardly think any shall be asked of you," said Roger Dare, quietly.

The Marquis of Glastonbury darted at him a look of subdued fury.

"It may be my good fortune to encounter you again, Mr. Roger Dare," said he in a voice that held an undoubted threat. "And if so, believe me, I shall try to demonstrate to you that extreme readiness of tongue is not always to be desired."

"I shall be pleased to meet the noble Marquis of Glastonbury, always," smiled Roger as he bowed carelessly. And then the Englishman and his companion stalked out, and the doors of White Towers closed behind them.

A half hour later the corvette's boat approached her side; but only one figure ascended the gangway.

"It is the Marquis," said Stephen. "What can have become of Ravenac?"

"I think I can form a pretty fair guess," re-

plied Roger. "Ravenac has been left ashore. White Towers and its secret ways, if any exist, have not seen the last of him, for some time to come."

CHAPTER V

HOW THE *PRESIDENT* MET THE *LITTLE BELT*

THE fact that the Marquis of Glastonbury had gone aboard the *Little Belt* and sailed away, leaving Ravenac behind him, excited considerable uneasiness in the mind of Stephen Randall.

"I don't like the idea of that man's prowling about White Towers, even if he is ignorant of any secret mode of effecting an entrance," said the young master of the place. "He is a very doubtful character; in fact I've heard Colonel Randall say that Ravenac had fled from France for some crime of a grave nature. I remember that, at the time, the impression that the words gave me was that he had taken a life."

"Ah," said Roger, "that sounds bad. A man with such a reputation would stop at nothing. I am very sorry that I must go; but I promised to notify the authorities of the im-

pressment of Mr. Deguyo; and again there is my cargo: it must be discharged."

"To be sure," said Stephen; "these matters must be attended to, instantly, and I would not for the world have you delay upon my account. Another thing: Ravenac is a very different man from the Marquis, and I do not in the least fear matching myself against him. But the Marquis—well his shadow has been lying upon this house for some days; and it will take a long time for the effects of the suspense to wear away as far as he personally is concerned. Sometimes, Roger," Stephen said bitterly, "I fear that I am a coward."

"Steve, don't say that; you are as brave as any one I know. It is your nature to be nervous, and the hard study and close confinement of this old house has added to it. Six months afloat with me upon the *Spitfire* would steady you so that even the Marquis of Glastonbury would seem to you as other men."

"Perhaps you are right, and perhaps I'll take advantage of your invitation before many trips."

"You'll have to make haste, then," said Roger, with a smile. They had left the house

and were walking toward the point where the *Spitfire's* boat was pulled up on the sand.

"Why?" asked Stephen, surprised.

"If you want to sail in a merchantman, that is," said the young captain.

"I don't think I understand."

"From the way things look," said Roger Dare, "war with England is no great distance off. No nation can stand continued insult; and it's my opinion that an accident might bring a declaration about, any day. And if war comes, the *Spitfire* takes aboard twelve good carronades and a 'Long Tom' which are ready and waiting for her at Plymouth. I'll make an armed brig of her and cruise against the commerce of the enemy."

"A privateer!"

"Yes." As he spoke Roger shook Stephen by the hand and stepped into his boat. "But I'll tell you more of this at another time. I'll run into the bay here on my way out. In the meantime keep an eye out for Monsieur Ravenac. He will not long delay in his operations, whatever they are. Good-bye, Steve," he called as the boat shoved off, and the oars dipped in the first stroke.

"Good-bye," said Stephen, waving his hand.

The boat pulled quickly out to the brig and was hastily hoisted in. The vessel had been standing in and out of the bay during Roger's stay ashore, and so had no anchor to lift; a few more sails were spread, her nose pointed seaward and away she went, heading south for the mouth of the Chesapeake.

Running up the Potomac it was not many hours before Roger was in Washington and had laid the matter before the authorities. The news of impressments had come to be a common thing on the high seas or in foreign ports; but this one had taken place in New York waters and it caused quite a sensation. A hurried meeting of the Cabinet was called, and a decision as to what to do was quickly reached.

"You have a good remembrance of this man Deguyo, I suppose," said the Secretary of the Navy to Roger after all was done and he had taken the youth to his office.

"It was not many days ago that he was taken out of my ship," said Roger wondering.

"If you saw him mustered on a deck with

a hundred or two others do you think you could pick him out?"

"I'm sure I could."

"I am about to send word to Captain Rodgers, at Annapolis, to put to sea in search of this British frigate. It would be as well if some one were aboard his ship, the *President*, who would know the man sought for."

"I have a competent mate," said Roger, promptly; "he can take the brig into New York, discharge her cargo and wait for me there."

"You will go, then?" eagerly.

"I will."

"Thank you; and perhaps you will carry these instructions to Captain Rodgers."

"With pleasure, sir."

A light carriage drawn by a fast team of horses bore Roger to the shores of the bay in a short time. Boarding the splendid *President*, which lay at anchor off Fort Severn, he delivered to the officer in command the instructions of the secretary. Captain Rodgers was at once summoned from Havre de Grace, and word was also sent to other absentees to join the frigate instantly.

The *President* was a frigate of forty-four guns, a sister ship to the afterward famous *Constitution* and *United States*, and was built after the design of Joshua Humphreys, an old Quaker ship-builder of Philadelphia. She was much broader in the beam and larger than the English type of frigate; indeed she and her sister ships, also the *Chesapeake*, *Constellation* and *Congress*, built at the same time, were specially constructed to outsail the English type and carry heavier guns.

On May 12th, less than two weeks after the impressment of John Deguyo, the *President* tripped her anchor and slipped down the bay.

"She is a beautiful ship," said Roger Dare to the captain of the frigate.

"Ay," said Captain Rodgers, well pleased; "she is indeed. She sails like a shadow, and will fight like a demon when she's given a chance."

"The British experts did not think well of Mr. Humphrey's model, I understand."

"No. They examined the *Constitution*, which is as like the *President* as another pea from the same pod, and called her a bundle

of pine planks. It's so like the British, you see, to be unable to discover merit in anything American. But let war once be declared and we'll show them a thing or two, my lad! The captains of the old navy, in the last war with the British, performed wonders with old, cranky, thin walled merchantmen; but now we've some frigates that are fore and fit, and we can meet anything throwing our own weight of metal and have no fear for the result."

Captain Rodgers was a fine example of the American man-of-war's-men; a bluff, cheery, resolute sea-dog, the master of his ship and men and of any situation that might arise upon deep water.

"I have heard of this fellow, Pechell, who commands the *Guerrière*; he's quite a noted bully in his own service, it seems," said Captain Rodgers.

"And he's made his ship a sea-bully," said the young master of the *Spitfire.* "He has her name lettered upon her foresail so that all might know who she is."

The eyes of the *President's* skipper twinkled.

"Is it so, indeed?" said he, with a laugh. "Ah, he's spoiling for a fight, is he? Well, who knows but what he will have a chance to train his guns upon a target larger than a little brig."

"I hope I am not going to appear too inquisitive," spoke young Dare, "but has this ship been ordered to sail in search of the *Guerrière*, specially?"

Captain John Rodgers laughed, and ran his fingers through his thick hair.

"My orders are to cruise up and down the coast and protect American shipping," he replied. "You can take what meaning you like from that, as I have done."

"But," persisted the other, "if you fall in with the *Guerrière* will you demand that Mr. Deguyo be given up to you?"

"I hope, in that event, to prevail upon Captain Pechell to release your passenger. That is all I can say, just now."

The news that the commander of the *Guerrière* had painted the name of his ship in great black letters upon her foretopsail, seemed to amuse and interest Captain Rodgers; and young Dare was astonished when he came

upon deck on the morning of the 13th to find the name

PRESIDENT

painted upon each of the American frigate's three topsails in letters much larger than those of the *Guerrière.*

"It is my desire that our friends shall know us from a distance," said the commander to the boy, as he caught his astonished look. But behind the laugh that accompanied these words the young master of the *Spitfire* fancied he detected a sterner meaning.

Three days after this, May 16, 1811, while cruising slowly along the coast, there came a cry from the lookout on the foretop.

"Sail ho!"

"Where away?" called the officer of the deck.

"Directly ahead, sir," answered the man.

The lieutenant of the *President* swept the horizon with the glass.

"I can't quite make her out," he said. Then: "Aloft, there!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"What does she look like?"

"Has the appearance of a frigate, sir; and she's under easy sail."

"How is she heading?"

"Directly for us, sir."

"We'll have to wait till she lifts a little," said the officer to Roger Dare, who stood upon the quarter deck at his side.

In a half-hour more the vessel was to be clearly seen; she was a ship and had the taut, clean look of a man-of-war. At her peak flew the ensign of Britain.

By this time Captain Rodgers had come upon deck.

"Show the colors," he commanded.

The Stars and Stripes shot upward and unfolded, fluttering, to the breeze. Almost instantly the stranger wore around and headed away.

"The *Guerrière*, without doubt," said Captain Rodgers. "What do you say, Mr. Dare?"

The young sailor had been studying the Englishman through a glass intently for some little time.

"She looks like a single decker, sir," he replied.

"The ports of her second tier are closed, I

suppose," said the *President's* commander, after an inspection. "She seems too heavy for anything but a frigate."

This was shortly after noon. The breeze was a light one and the stranger shook out all her canvas; however the American vessel gained steadily, but slowly. The shadows of night drew on; the British ship hauled to the wind, tacked and tried various methods of escaping the American, but with little success. The *President* hung in her wake like a great hound with its nose to the trail.

"Clear the decks," ordered Captain Rodgers, at length, as night and a thick fog began to fall. The men sprang to obey as the drum rolled through the ship, accompanied by the rasping notes of the boatswain's pipe.

Guns were shotted, small arms distributed and the men stood at their posts. Finally the *President* drew up close on the weather-bow of the stranger craft, and Captain Rodgers placed his trumpet to his lips and hailed her.

"Ahoy! What ship is that?"

There was silence for a moment, save for a creaking of the blocks, the groaning of straining spars and the wash of the sea. Then a

voice from the British ship came through the gloom with a counter query :

" What ship is that ? "

In the light of the battle lantern, young Dare saw a frown gather upon Captain Rodger's face ; then he saw him stride to the rail and shout in a stentorian voice :

" What ship is that ? "

Suddenly, without a moment's warning, a gun spat redly through the gathering fog ; a solid shot smashed through the bulwark of the *President* and struck her mainmast. Almost instantly one of the forward guns of the American frigate barked gruffly in a shot fired without orders.

" Who fired that gun ? " cried the commander, whirling about.

" I'll find out, sir," answered the second lieutenant. " But it was regular enough, sir. It's a standing order of yours, is it not, that, if we are fired into, to return the fire without waiting for orders."

" True," said Captain Rodgers. As he spoke three shots were fired in quick succession by the Englishman. Then the commander continued, calmly :

"Give her a broadside, and keep firing until I pass the word to stop."

In another moment a sleet of shot burst from the ports of the *President* and swept the decks of the British ship. Another and still another broadside, and then the stranger ceased her return fire and lay, with her top works a-wreck, motionless upon the water.

"Stop firing!" shouted the American commander.

This order was obeyed instantly, and the *President* crept slowly forward. Then a sheet of flame burst from the British warship as a whole range of guns were discharged at the frigate.

"Give her another broadside," cried the *President's* captain.

Again the Yankee carronades thundered, and this time with such good effect as to render the other ship completely helpless; indeed she wore around, stern on, and had the commander of the *President* so desired, he could have raked her fore and aft.

Once more the *President* crept forward through the mist toward the dim hull before her.

"Do you strike?" shouted Captain Rodgers from his quarter-deck.

"No," came back the plucky reply, without an instant's hesitation.

"What ship is that?" cried the Yankee commander.

"His Majesty's corvette, *Little Belt.*"

The two vessels were grinding together as this reply came. Both decks were now bright with lanterns and crowded with men; and Roger Dare, as he stood at the *President's* fore-rail, caught sight of a handsome, well-groomed figure almost directly before him. It was the elegant Marquis of Glastonbury: in his hand was his gold snuff-box, and he was taking a delicate pinch with all the coolness in the world.

"Ah, Mr. Dare," said he, leaning slightly forward, no surprise whatever upon his face, "we meet once more."

"Sooner than I had expected," answered the young seaman.

"And once more you seem to have rather the best of the exchange," spoke the Marquis, smiling, but with a narrowing of the eyes.

"Luck seems with you; but it cannot last. It is always so with beginners."

Before the boy had a chance to answer, the two ships had drifted apart, and so thick had the fog now become that the *Little Belt* almost instantly disappeared in it.

CHAPTER VI

THE SHADOW OF RAVENAC

NOTHING was seen of the *Little Belt* until next morning; then the *President* ranged up and a lieutenant was sent aboard with an offer of assistance. In the fight, eleven men had been killed in the British ship, and twenty-one wounded; on board the *President*, one boy had been hurt by a flying splinter, and that was all.

Seeing that the corvette required no aid, the American frigate sailed away in search of the *Guerrière*. But after a week or more this was given up, and Roger Dare went to join his brig at New York. He found her awaiting him, and at once made sail for Good Ground.

As he rounded the headland and entered the bay, he saw Stephen hoisting the sail of the catboat; and as he dropped anchor, the little craft crept alongside, and the young master of White Towers came on board. As he

gripped his friend's hand, Roger Dare noticed that his appearance had altered ; there was a haggard, anxious look that seemed likely to become a settled expression of brooding fear.

"Has anything occurred?" asked Roger, after they had gone down into the cabin.

"I think not," answered Stephen. "That may sound strange to you ; but really I don't know. And that is the worst of it, Roger ; the suspense of it all is becoming more than I can stand. It's making me ill."

Roger took him by the shoulders kindly, and looked steadily into his face.

"You take things too seriously," said he. "You brood over them. But you must stop it, and look the situation in the face, calmly."

"How can I with this man Ravenac haunting the grounds by night. Everywhere I turn, it seems to me, I see his face."

"Ah ! And he is still on the ground then?"

"He is. And there are two others with him."

"That is very good news," said Roger.

"Good news," cried the other boy, astonished.

"The fact that Ravenac still lingers in the

neighborhood of White Towers proves that he has not yet been able to accomplish the design of the Marquis of Glastonbury."

"That is true," replied Stephen, thoughtfully. "I never looked at it that way."

They had seated themselves at the cabin table, facing each other. Roger leaned forward and tapped the board with his finger tips.

"Either one of two things is the case," spoke he, decidedly. "Ravenac does not know of any secret entrance to White Towers, or, if he does know, he has been unable to locate the key of the cipher."

"I have kept a careful watch ever since you sailed. Cato and I cleaned and overhauled all the firearms at the house; and all the servants are on their guard."

"But you have not told them of what you suspect."

"No: merely to keep an eye out for prowlers of any sort. I thought it best not to alarm them; it might set them into a panic. And then they might talk."

"They would be sure to."

"The government officials who came up

from Washington upon the discovery of the existence of the copy, said that it would not do to have any news of the thing get abroad. The public would grow to distrust the efficiency of the coast defenses, and it might make trouble in the event of war."

"And war," said Roger, gravely, "looks to be no great distance off."

"You have heard something, then!" cried Stephen, eagerly. "Tell me."

Accordingly, while all was being made snug upon the brig, Roger related his experiences. At the finish Stephen's cheeks were flushed and his eyes were glowing.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "So their insolence has been repaid in kind at last. Now let us see what they will say to this, for all their boasting."

They then went ashore, and had lunch at White Towers. During the course of this, Stephen noticed his friend looking at him smiling now and then.

"What is it?" he inquired.

"So you, too, desire war with England. Well, for a timid youth, Steve, it seems to me that you are rather martial."

Stephen laughed a little.

"That is very different," said he. "War is not the same as this perplexing situation at White Towers. There would be no misgivings there, no doubts. Here I can take no action; I can only wait until the other side makes a move."

"What you require, Steve, is conditioning, as I've told you so often before. The four walls of your library will not do it, neither will your musty old books. I'll never be satisfied or you will never be hardy until you face the sea on board the *Spitfire*—face her in all her moods. Work hard, sleep sound and stop studying for a year and then all the Ravenacs and scented marquises in the world will not worry you."

"I suppose you are right," answered the other lad, thoughtfully. "And I'll think it over, Roger. But, as things stand, I cannot leave White Towers. You can see that."

"Tell me all you have learned of Monsieur Ravenac and his doings since I have been gone."

"I have very little to tell, except as regards

the two men who joined him shortly after you sailed."

"What sort of men are they?"

"One of them looks like an Indian half-breed; the other is a white man, a thin active sort of a fellow, with his left arm gone at the shoulder."

"Have they taken up their quarters anywhere near at hand?"

"They have, and that is one of the things that has been worrying me. Instead of going to the inn about a mile above here, they have settled at the old stone tower down near the bay."

Roger started a little, and a strange look came into his face.

"Could you not drive them away?" asked he.

"No. Unfortunately the tower does not belong to the estate. I went to see Mr. Collingwood, the owner, but he said that the tower and the few acres of land about it had passed out of his hand a few days before."

"Ah! And who was the purchaser?"

"Monsieur Ravenac."

"This grows interesting," said Roger, coolly.

"I think the *Spitfire* will anchor in the bay for some time to come."

"You will remain here then?" cried Stephen, in delight.

"For a time at any rate. I'll have a look at Ravenac and his cronies; perhaps I may be able to suggest something that will prove of benefit."

He ate for some time in silence. Stephen watched him anxiously.

"It seems to me," said Roger, at length, "that it is rather fortunate that these men choose to take possession of the old tower. You have them directly under your eye, so to speak."

"I had thought of that. But, for all, I'd much rather that they were not in the neighborhood of Good Ground at all."

"How have they acted?"

"Very quietly, indeed. Ravenac seems disposed to be friendly. I have met him several times upon the road, and once he came here upon some trifling errand."

"Humph! I don't like that. But what did you think of it at the time?"

Stephen colored.

"I know you will say that I am very easily imposed upon," said he. "But really, I thought at the time that we had perhaps been needlessly alarming ourselves regarding his presence."

"I can see that Monsieur Ravenac is a person of some parts," said Roger, leaning back in his chair. "I thought as much from the start; for a judge of men like the noble Marquis of Glastonbury is not one to select incompetent tools."

"This impression did not remain with me very long," said Stephen hastily. "I knew that the Marquis had left the man behind him for a purpose—and that purpose was not far to seek."

After finishing the last dish which old Cato had placed before them, the two boys arose and went outside into the beautiful sunshine of the perfect June day.

"Look," said Stephen, "you can see the tower from here."

He pointed as he spoke toward a point just below the shore of the little bay. Upon a low hill stood a squat looking tower, built of white stone and with a single door and window. It

was a peculiar sort of structure, and no one had ever been able to quite make out the purpose for which it was built.

"It has stood there," said Stephen, "probably since the Dutch settlements hereabouts. Colonel Randall always thought it had been intended for a wind mill; but if such was the case the builders had never deemed it worth while to finish it."

They slowly crossed the lawn and strolled down the sandy road toward the tower. For all its elevation the place seemed damp to Roger as they drew near, and the mold of age was thick about its base.

"It's not a very inviting place for a dwelling," remarked the young skipper of the *Spitfire*.

"No," agreed Stephen. "I should think it would be rather uncomfortable myself."

"There must be very good reasons for Monsieur Ravenac's selection of this dwelling," said Roger, after they had stood for awhile and examined the building from a distance of about fifty yards. Then, thoughtfully, "Do you know whether this place ever belonged to White Towers?"

There was something in his friend's voice that made Stephen look at him quickly.

"No," answered he; "I never heard of it."

"I think it did," said Roger.

Stephen was surprised; he looked quickly at the other once more, and then said:

"Roger, you've got an idea of some sort. What is it?"

"When was White Towers erected?"

"I could not say; but after the English occupation, I believe."

"This building," pointing toward the squat structure before them, "was put up about the same time. See, it is of the same sort of white stone, and the style of workmanship is about the same. I have often wondered why Colonel Randall's house was called White Towers when there was never a sign of a tower upon it. Now I understand. The house took its name from this," nodding toward the tower.

"You may be right," said Stephen with interest. "It is not at all improbable, although the colonel always said the tower must be Dutch."

"He may have been correct," said the young sailor; "but if the tower is Dutch then the

house is also Dutch. That they were erected about the same period seems certain to me, also that this tower and ground once belonged to the estate."

He was silent for a few moments, and then resumed :

"Are there not some old deeds or maps of the estate somewhere about?"

"Yes," said Stephen, eagerly ; "in the attic there is an old hair trunk full of such stuff. But, tell me, what have you in mind?"

"In a few moments. What sort of a man did you find Ravenac to be when he was in Colonel Randall's employ?"

"I did not pay a great deal of attention. But I've heard the colonel say that he understood his duties very well, indeed. He seemed to take the utmost interest in the estate ; in fact he knew a great deal more about it than any one else upon it except the Colonel."

"What were his habits?"

"Rather strange at times. That is one of the things Colonel Randall did not like about him. He absented himself occasionally without notice ; and one would meet him in queer parts of the house at night or in the early

morning. But as he seemed to be a most ardent advocate of ventilation, and was always going about opening windows or something of the kind, we ascribed his odd appearances to that."

"Did you notice this before, during or after the completion of the plans for the defense of the coast?"

"It must have been afterward, for Ravenac did not enter the Colonel's employ until the work was all but finished."

"I think," said Roger, thoughtfully, "that Monsieur Ravenac is pretty well acquainted with some things at the existence of which we can only guess. But let us go overhaul this old hair trunk of which you have spoken. I think we shall learn something from its contents that will interest us."

"One moment," said Stephen, as his friend turned about as though to go back to White Towers. "There is some one at the window."

Roger looked toward the square window of the tower; a lean face topped by a mass of thick black hair was framed within it, and a pair of burning dark eyes were fixed upon them.

"It's the half-breed," whispered Stephen.

"There is some one coming out," said the young sailor.

Even as he spoke the door opened and the black-clad, stoop-shouldered figure of Ravenac emerged; he gave them one swift glance of inquiry and then advanced toward them, a smile upon his lips, his hand outstretched in friendly greeting.

CHAPTER VII

THE OLD STONE TOWER

Both boys ignored the extended hand, but Ravenac only smiled and shrugged his stooped shoulders.

"You have come to pay me a visit. That is good of you, and I am much pleased."

"We were looking at the tower; that is all," said Roger Dare, coldly.

"An odd sort of structure, is it not? I had always admired it and am at last its owner, as I had hoped to be. For a new country like this it is a real antique,—much older than any other building in this section, in point of fact."

"Older than White Towers, do you think?" asked Roger, carelessly.

He kicked at some loose stones in the road as he spoke and he looked exactly as he desired to look—like a bored person who only spoke out of common politeness. But Ravenac



BOTH BOYS IGNORED THE EXTENDED HAND

threw him a rapid suspicious look; Roger observed it and went on.

"I had fancied that the tower and the house were connected in some way."

His tone and manner were the same as before; but a dark flush crept into the sallow cheeks of Ravenac, and he answered:

"I do not understand how they could be. The property does not even belong to White Towers."

"So I understand," said Roger, "and that surprised me. You see I paid a visit to this place some years ago—about five, I think—and liked this section of the bay shore very much. The tower was a favorite nook of mine, then, and I explored it pretty thoroughly."

"Oh, indeed!" Ravenac's eyes swept the boy from head to foot in a searching look. "I am pleased to find another admirer of the place."

There was silence for a moment. Stephen saw Ravenac's long, supple fingers twine and intertwine nervously; but Roger calmly gazed out over the bay, his eyes dwelling upon the trim lines of the *Spitfire* as she rode gracefully

at anchor there. Then Ravenac took a step toward the young sailor, and went on :

"And so you explored the tower pretty well, did you?"

"Boys of fifteen generally do those things very well, indeed," smiled Roger.

"Boys of fifteen have strong imaginations," said Ravenac. Then after a short pause, "How old are you now?"

"Nineteen," answered the other.

"At nineteen the imagination is still rather strong," said the man, in such a low voice that Stephen, who stood a few yards away, could not hear the words, and there was a note in the voice that caused Roger Dare to throw his head back and stare the man steadily in the face. "And it would be best," said Ravenac, "if you were to forget these dreamings of things it is not good for you to know."

Roger looked at him for a full minute after he had ceased to speak ; then he pointed out over the bay and asked :

"Do you see that brig?"

"I do," answered the man.

"There is no trimmer or stauncher vessel sails these waters than she," said Roger Dare

in a tone of pride. "And I have been her master for almost two years. She has always landed her cargoes in good condition, and her passengers, when she had any, never made complaint. I have brought her safely through every gale that has blown along these coasts since I took command of her, and the oldest sea-dog in her forecastle will tell you that I know my trade."

"Well," said Ravenac, with a sort of sneer.

"A dreamer does not do such things," said Roger, quietly. "And, while I am in the humor, allow me to tell you, Monsieur Ravenac, that I am myself the best judge of what is good for me to know."

"Be sure that you are not making a mistake," said the man.

"Trust me for that!" returned the lad promptly and boldly.

The Marquis of Glastonbury had, a few weeks before, assumed a high and mighty tone with Roger Dare, and had thought it politic to change it to one of soft words and subtle flattery. Ravenac had forgotten this lesson in diplomacy for the moment, but now he recollected and went back to it.

"Oh, well, I suppose you are right after all," he said with a sudden smile and a wave of the hand. "But it is best to warn youth against tendencies that might prove harmful. However, I feel quite confident that you are in no danger, as you say. Any boy that can bring a ship into this bay as you did yours, only a few hours ago, is both master of himself and of circumstances."

"You are an admirer of the Marquis of Glastonbury, I see," said Roger, coldly. Ravenac elevated his brows inquiringly, and the boy went on. "The Marquis is a master hand at certain things, I understand, and I suppose you do well to pattern by him."

And with this he turned away; with Stephen he slowly trudged along the road toward White Towers, leaving the man staring after them from under moody brows.

"Well?" asked Stephen inquiringly. He had been a somewhat puzzled listener to the dialogue between Roger and Ravenac, and seemed eager to be informed.

"I think it is just as I suspect," said Roger. "But I cannot say until I have seen the inside of the tower and made a complete search."

"You told him that you had done that, long ago."

"But not to find what I should now be looking for. I said that but to draw him out, and his words and actions afterward are what has fixed me in the belief that there is some sort of connection between the old tower and your house. We found one underground passage, the opening of which is not a hundred yards from the tower. Why should there not be one leading to the tower itself?"

"Roger!" Stephen grew pale. He had thought of this possibility before, but his friend's putting it into words brought it vividly before him.

"Did you notice how he looked when I said that I fancied there must be some connection between the tower and the house? He did not know how to take me; I might have meant association only, or an actual passage connecting the two. But let us get at the old deeds and maps you have spoken of; they may tell us more than we think."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SOUNDING OF THE WAR DRUM

THE old trunk in the attic of White Towers was quickly brought forth from beneath a lot of rubbish, dusted and opened. It was full of yellow parchments with big imposing looking red seals; and after a great deal of searching through these—a search which occupied the best part of two days, Stephen came upon the knowledge which they sought. The old stone tower had once been a part of the estate, but long before it had come into the Randall family.

"There," said Roger, with a sigh, as he drew his feet beneath him and sat cross-legged upon the floor among the scattered deeds, "that is settled."

"What next?" asked Stephen, who sat upon the old trunk opposite his friend.

"The next step will be much more difficult than the first," said Roger, "and that is to

discover whether an underground passage really exists between the two buildings."

"We discovered the opening to the other one, in the cellar," suggested Steve. "Perhaps it would be well to look there again; suppose we do, after dinner."

"Very well," said Roger. "We chanced upon the other by accident, who knows but what we may come upon a second in the same way."

They restored the deeds and other papers to the trunk, brushed the dust from their garments, took a refreshing plunge in a creek near at hand and then sat down to their meal with fine appetites.

Old Cato served them; as a rule the ancient African was as expressionless as a statue when engaged in this most important function. But to-day he seemed strangely agitated; indeed several times he overturned things, a fact so unusual as to cause Stephen to look at him in surprise.

"Is there anything wrong, Cato?" he asked, at length.

The old negro swallowed once or twice, then made reply.

"Mars' Steve, I hopes yo' won't think dis yeah old niggah is gone clean outen he head, sah."

"Of course not, Cato," said Stephen kindly. "Tell me what's the matter."

"Some time ago, sah," said the old man, "yo' don' gone told us all to watch out fo' anybody dat appears to be sort ob sneaking around de house."

"And have you seen any one?" asked the master eagerly.

"No, sah! I have not, Mars' Steve, an' I reckon none ob the others have either." He came close to his young master as he spoke and now lowered his voice to a husky whisper. "Was dem Christian folks yo' asked us to watch out for, Mars' Steve?"

Stephen smiled, while Roger looked at the old servant and awaited with interest what he had to say.

"I meant any one who came near the house —that is any one that had no apparent business here."

The old man bent over the speaker and sunk his voice into an awed whisper much lower than the other.

"Did you mean ghostes, too, Mars' Steve?"

"What do you mean?" asked Stephen, staring at the old man in astonishment.

"I mean, sah, dat we uns done watch fo' people trapsin' 'round outside de house; and now dey's ghostes inside, sah."

"Nonsense," cried Stephen.

"One minute," interposed Roger. "Let us find out just what he means."

"Very well," smiled Stephen. "Go ahead."

"What makes you think there are ghosts at White Towers?"

"It's not only me, sah. No indeedy. It's de whole lot on us down in de kitchen, Mars' Roger."

"But," insisted Roger; "what makes you all think so?"

"'Case we heahs de spooks, sah. We heahs dem walkin' about, sah, and we heahs dem whispering in de walls."

"In the walls!" cried Roger, while Stephen leaped to his feet, excitedly.

"Yes, sah, Mars' Roger, jest as suah as yo' lib, sah, we heahs dem, all ob us does!"

Roger motioned for Stephen to resume his seat; the lad did so, but his eyes were gleam-

ing with a feverish excitement, and there was a flush in his face that told how wrought up he was.

"Now," said Roger, calmly, "tell us just what you mean by all this, Cato. And tell us everything."

The ancient negro took on an air of great importance, and coughed and pulled at his white stock.

"De fust time any ob us heah dis yeah spook, sah, was free nights ago. Dat yeah white man dat yo' has wukin' in de garden, Mars' Steve, he was sittin' in de lower hall tellin' we uns all 'bout de British and how de 'Nited States was going to gib dem a real good lickin', sah. But just in de very middle ob he talk he stop and kind ob stah 'round.

"'Wha's dat?' says he.

"'Wha's what?' says I.

"'Wha's dat noise?' says he.

"'I don' heah no noise,' says I.

"Deah wasn't nobody heah anyt'ing but dat gardener; so aftah awhile he goes on wif he story. Den he stops again, and 'clah to goodness if he didn't get white as a whitewash wall, sah.

"'Deah it is again,' he says.

"'White man,' says I, 'yo's dreamin'!'

"'No, I isn't,' says he. 'Dey's some kind ob a strange noise going on. Listen!'

"So we uns all listen. Fust we don' heah a sound; den a little at a time we heahs de creak ob footsteps walkin' along de hall, sah, but deh wasn't nobody in sight. Golly, we uns was all mighty scared, sah, but we listen, and we listen; an' very soon we heah a whisperin' from one corner jest like as if dey was two pussons a stan'in' dar a talking secret like."

Here the old man paused and mopped his brow with a great scarlet handkerchief.

"Well?" asked Stephen, impatiently.

"Dat's all, sah," answered Cato. "We uns didn't stay to heah no mo'."

"Why didn't you tell me of this before?" inquired the young master.

"'Case I suspect it might be some fool trick at fust, Mars' Steve; but when it go on each night in de same place, I got so scahed I didn't know what to do."

"Have the servants talked of this matter between themselves?" asked Roger.

L OF C.

"Golly, sah, dey don't talk 'bout anyfing else! Dey's all pow'ful frightened, Mars' Steve," turning to Stephen, "and dey all might leave de house, sah."

"Nonsense," cried Stephen.

"Suah's yo' live, sah, it's de truf."

When the meal was finished, Roger and Stephen went into the big old library and closed the door. They stood looking at each other for a time; then Roger broke the silence.

"It seems," said he, "that Monsieur Ravenac has effected an entrance into White Towers."

"And is making a search for the key to the cipher. And he may find it, Roger." Stephen clutched Roger's arm and held it tightly; "he may find it and deliver it to the British and my benefactor's memory will be disgraced."

"No, no," said the young sailor, hastily.

"I tell you—yes," cried Stephen. "He had no right to make that copy of the key, Roger, you know that as well as I. The officers from Washington spoke of it while they were here and told me privately that the feel-

ing in the matter was very strong at the war office. So, you see what the result will be. Nothing is said now, but the discovery of the key by Ravenac will permit a public discussion, and then Colonel Randall will be made to bear it all. He meant everything for the very best, but that will make no difference."

"I suppose you are right," said Roger, slowly. "But the most important result of the finding of the key by Ravenac will be its effect upon the country and its fortunes in a possible war with England."

"I know, I know," said Stephen, striding up and down, feverishly. "I see that, Roger; but Colonel Randall was a father to me, and I can't help thinking of his reputation first."

"What is most to the point just now is the prevention of the thing that will result in all this."

"We will have Ravenac and his friends taken by the authorities."

"Upon what charge?" asked Roger, quietly.

"Treason!" exclaimed Stephen. All the boy's timidity had now vanished, and he seemed like a young tiger, so great was his

desire to shield the name of his dead benefactor from possible disgrace.

"You can prove nothing of the sort against him," spoke Roger. "The courts would not listen to you for a moment. Another thing: to have the man taken would only make the entire matter public; and that, recollect, is the thing to be avoided."

Stephen gave a groan and dropped helplessly into a chair.

"What shall we do?" he asked despairingly.

"Take the matter in our own hands. We'll fight these people with their own weapons—cunning and dissimulation."

"But how shall we begin?"

"First we must find this passage from the old tower and engage masons to wall it up, as was done with the one we discovered some five years ago. Then we must have some people here upon whom we can depend in every emergency. The servants, I suppose, are honest enough, but they are not fighters. And lastly, we must institute a search for the cipher key upon our own account—and at once."

All these things the boys proceeded to do. Three hardy young seamen were brought ashore from the *Spitfire* and installed at White Towers, fully armed and instructed to watch narrowly every one who approached the place. The servants, with the exception of old Cato, were allowed to go; and then inch by inch the walls were sounded along the lower hall for the secret passage suspected to exist here.

But this produced no results. Old Cato resolutely clung to his story as to just where the sounds were heard, and at last Roger suggested that they break into the wall and make sure.

Bars and sledges were procured; the carpets were carefully taken up and the boys set to work. But this, too, failed to give them any clue; the walls were of solid masonry, and they made no impression on them, and at last gave it up, convinced that they were upon the wrong scent. Then began the search of the great old house for the hiding-place of the much sought for cipher key. Room after room was submitted to a minute examination; hammers tapped constantly upon floors, walls

and ceilings, every article of furniture was examined with scrupulous care, even upholstery was ripped open, leaving a trail of ruin behind them that almost drove Cato out of his senses.

And while this search was going on day after day, the armed seamen patroled the grounds and the *Spitfire* lay riding the smooth rollers of the little bay. Of the inhabitants of the stone tower down by the shore, little was seen. Once Roger, from an upper window, saw Ravenac in the road; the man paused and watched the brawny tar who paced the lawn so calmly, a businesslike looking musket across his shoulder. And as the Frenchman turned away Roger noted a quick smile gleam across his sallow face—a smile that contained both mockery and derision.

Then, as his stay at White Towers was longer by far than he had anticipated, Roger gave orders for the brig to sail for Baltimore, where there was a cargo awaiting her. His first mate was a competent seaman, and trustworthy in every respect; and when the young skipper saw his trim little craft hoist anchor

and square away southward, he felt no misgivings—he was confident that she would be as well handled as though he were himself on board.

The days slipped by, and still the search went on; from roof to the ground floor, White Towers had been sounded and searched as it had never been sounded and searched before. In some places they had gone so far as to rip up the floors, and all the walls showed the scars that eager hands and sharp-edged tools had made.

"We have the cellar before us yet," said Roger as they sat one evening in the midst of a confusion of books and furniture in the library. He was pulling the long ears of Stephen's favorite dog—a dun-colored mongrel with a strong dash of hound in it—and the dog was beating at him with its broad paws and lolling its tongue delightedly.

"You have had hopes of the cellar from the start, haven't you?" said Stephen.

"Yes; but not in the way of discovering the cipher. It seems to me that the cellar should reveal something that is now only known to Ravenac and his companions."

"You still hold to the belief then, that a secret passage exists in spite of our failure in the lower hall?"

"I do. But I cannot understand one thing. Ravenac and his friends know of this passage, they have traversed its length, they have been within the walls of this house, possibly many times. But still I have never seen the slightest trace of them in any of the rooms."

"You have looked for evidence of their visits, then?"

"Every morning."

"And with no result."

"Not the slightest."

"What do you draw from that?"

Roger pushed the mongrel from him and leaned toward his friend.

"I think," said he, slowly, "that the enemy are also making a search."

"Of course—for the cipher."

"No; for the door of the secret passage that leads into the house."

Stephen started and stared.

"Explain yourself," said he.

"Every such passage has two openings," said Roger. "Ravenac knows of one—the old

stone tower; but in my opinion he has failed to find the other. Indeed, my theory is that he may as well be a thousand miles from White Towers for all the practical advantage his knowledge has given him."

Stephen's face lighted up at these words.

"You think then that they are seeking the secret door from without, and we from within?"

"Exactly."

There was a silence between the two boys; the hound, which had stretched his length at his master's feet, now raised its head, pricked its ears, and growled uneasily.

"Be quiet, Nip," said Stephen.

The night was a beautiful one, well toward the end of June; a moon flooded the little bay with silver, as they could see from the windows, and the hum of the night insects and the soft stirring of the trees and bushes was all that was heard. But the hound arose to his feet, elevated his head, sniffed and growled once more.

The boys went on with their conversation, but the dog prowled about the room, a deep note now and then rumbling from his throat.

There was a huge fireplace in the library, now cold, of course, and this seemed to be the especial object of the hound's attention. He sniffed about it for a few moments, growled, and then, at Stephen's command came and lay down once more. But in a few moments he was up again, growling and sniffing about the fireplace, and at length burst into a loud bark.

Roger had been watching the actions of the mongrel carelessly; but now he showed interest.

"What in the world is the matter with you, Nip?" cried Stephen impatiently. "Be still sir, or out you go!"

"Let him alone for a moment," said Roger. They sat and watched the hound as it sniffed and grumbled about the fireplace. Suddenly Roger started, leaned forward and placed his hand upon the dog's back.

"Down, lad," said he sharply.

The hound crouched down obediently and was silent. Roger held up one hand warningly to Stephen. They remained quiet and listening; almost as faint as the gnawing of a mouse, came a sound from behind the great

stone slab that formed the back of the fireplace. Scratch, scratch, it went steadily, for a time—then, suddenly, there came a slight rushing sound as of the falling of a small quantity of sand or dried cement, followed by the sharp impact of a falling brick upon a stone floor and a sudden exclamation, that seemed stifled in its inception.

The boys arose to their feet with one accord; almost as they did so, there came the shock of a light gun from a distance; through the window they saw a vessel standing into the moonlit bay.

"It's the *Spitfire*," cried Roger in surprise.

They knew at once that something was wrong, and raced away toward the shores of the bay, shoved off in the catboat and soon stood upon the deck of the brig.

"Mr. Taylor," cried Roger to his mate who now approached them. "Why have you brought the vessel back to Good Ground?"

"In times like these," said the mate coolly, "the master of the ship should be on board. I didn't wait at Baltimore to take on any cargo as ordered, sir."

"And why not?"

"Because, sir, I was afraid that the brig might be blockaded in the port. War has been declared against England."

CHAPTER IX

WHAT THE NIGHT BROUGHT FORTH

WHAT the mate of the *Spitfire* reported to Roger Dare was true. After years of outrage the Congress of the United States had declared to the nations that the condition of affairs was no longer to be tolerated ; and the country at once armed for the conflict.

Indeed before the brig came into the bay at Good Ground the first gun of the war had already been fired by the frigate *President* in her chase of the *Belvidere*, thirty-two.

The small American navy, so destined for glory, was already at sea in search of British ships-of-war or merchantmen. But this brilliant page of the republic's history had almost never been written, for President Madison had all but made up his mind to keep the vessels at home and use them for harbor defense. However, Captain Bainbridge and other officers pleaded so earnestly that this policy was abandoned and the ships went forth to grap-

ple with the enemy. A horde of privateers were arming in the different ports; Roger Dare knew this and thought of the new carronades and the beautiful long gun with which he and his father had planned to furnish the brig in case of war.

"But I'll let that matter rest until this affair at White Towers is settled," said he, as he sat in the *Spitfire's* cabin with Stephen an hour or so after the vessel had come to anchor. "The war will last long and I'll have lots of chance to take part in it later on; but the case of Ravenac is urgent."

"Especially as he seems upon the point of digging his way through the wall into the library," suggested Stephen. "He must be getting desperate."

"I don't think that was his intention," said the young skipper. "It's my opinion that he was merely searching for the outlet to the tunnel and that the fall of the plaster and stones was an accident. However, it has done one good thing; it has shown us where to look for the passage which has so baffled us."

"Who would ever have dreamed of it being in one of the partitions?" said Stephen.

"That, I suppose, is the very reason why the man who laid out the building placed it there. But if we had paused to measure the thickness of the wall we must have reasoned the thing out. However, at best the passage must be a narrow one, and must have its outlet somewhere upon the ground floor, a thing which I never expected."

There was a slight commotion upon deck; footsteps were heard descending the ladder, and a knock came upon the cabin door.

"Come in," called the young captain.

The second mate, a brisk young seaman, entered.

"There is a large vessel standing on and off at the mouth of the bay, sir," said he. "A boat has just pulled away from her and is heading for the shore some distance below."

"I'll come on deck," said the lad, promptly. "Come, Steve."

Once on deck they directed their gaze toward the point indicated. The moon was still flooding the calm, almost unruffled water with silver, and the strange ship was as plainly visible as she would be had it been broad day.

"She's British, from her rig," said Roger, after a moment's inspection, "and a man-of-war from her general trimness."

"She's sending her boat in to attack us, perhaps," said Stephen, excitedly.

"It's not likely," returned his friend. "We are lying in a sort of shadow and burning no lights. I doubt if they even suspect our presence; but for all that it would be best to be prepared."

He gave some quick, low voiced orders to the first mate, who passed them noiselessly along. In a very short space of time the arms' chest had been opened and pikes, cutlasses, and pistols were passed around among the ship's company. The two four pounder brass guns of the brig were charged with musket balls and dragged to the starboard side, from which an attack was most likely to come; and then all hands waited.

From some distance across the bay came the steady splash of oars; a ship's yawl was pulling rapidly toward the shore; she was too far off for those on board the *Spitfire* to make out who or how many were in her, even with the moonlight's powerful aid; but Roger's eyes

never left the boat, for all that. Stephen noticed this and said:

"I wonder what can be their purpose in going ashore?"

For answer Roger pointed toward a deep red spot of light that burned steadily from a slight elevation on the shore.

"Do you see that?" asked he.

"It's a light in the old stone tower," exclaimed Stephen.

"Exactly. And that yawl is heading for the beach near the tower as straight as it can go. It would seem that Monsieur Ravenac is to have some visitors."

"And from a British ship-of-war."

"I think I can give the name of the most important of the guests."

Stephen looked at him, but said nothing.

"It is the Marquis of Glastonbury. Now that war is declared between the two nations he feels that he cannot delay much longer. He must secure the cipher soon, or not at all; for times of war are unlike times of peace, and upon even a suspicion of such treason as Ravenac is endeavoring to work we could now have them arrested."

"You are right," said Stephen, "and we will not delay in doing so; it will be a much safer way. To-morrow I will lay charges against these men before the proper authorities."

"To-morrow may be too late," said Roger, quietly.

"What do you mean?" alarmed.

"I mean that the visit ashore at this time indicates that the Marquis of Glastonbury has determined upon something immediate. All is quiet in this section. Your nearest neighbor is several miles away; if an armed boat's crew were to attack White Towers none would be the wiser."

"But why should they attack the house? What could they hope to gain by it? The cipher is not to be found in the few hours that they would be in possession—it is too well hidden."

"You forget Ravenac. This man knows more of the secrets of White Towers than either of us—perhaps he is acquainted with the very place of the paper's concealment and can place his hand upon it when once inside."

The yawl had run up on the sand at a point

which was overshadowed by some tall trees growing close down to the water's edge. And now a broad flare of light shot out across the lonely road that ran by the old stone tower; it was the door that had opened and a number of men, all heavily armed, were seen to go in; then the door closed once more and the single red beam from the window was all that could be observed.

"I think," said Roger Dare, "that we had better go ashore; we will be of more service there."

He summoned his first and second mate and told them as much of the situation as he thought advisable.

"So, while I am gone, keep a sharp lookout for that British vessel in the offing. She will not attempt to come in, for there is not sufficient depth of water for her at the mouth of the harbor; but if the brig is discovered she may send boats and make an attack that way."

"You may depend on us," said the first mate. "The four pounders will warn off any boats that they may send against us."

"And I only hope we will have a chance

to use them," said the young second mate, with a swift glance toward the British ship which was still plainly visible. "I was impressed in the British service once and was treated like a dog. Nothing but gunpowder burned under their very noses can wipe that out."

The commander of the *Spitfire* knew these men were to be trusted; so he had no misgivings when he entered the catboat with Stephen and put off for the shore. The three seamen on guard at White Towers were quickly made acquainted with the state of affairs.

"Sink my old hull!" exclaimed one of them, as he smacked his broad hands together in great satisfaction. "So we are to have a chance at them at last, are we? Well every sailor man that hails from the United States has a score to settle with them high nosed swabs in the British frigates, and many a craft of theirs will go to Davy Jones because of it."

"You may be sure of that, Starbuck," replied Roger with a laugh. "But the thing that most concerns us now is the boat's crew that has landed below here."

"Do you think they mean to board us, captain?" asked Starbuck, eagerly.

"I am not sure, but it would not surprise me if we heard from them in some way before morning."

All the firearms were gotten out and their charges looked to; then the two boys went over the house and locked everything carefully. The lower doors were braced with planks taken from the woodshed and heavy articles of furniture dragged against them.

"I declah to goodness!" exclaimed old Cato, his eyes rolling in wonder, "yo' making a reg'lah fort outen dis yeah house, Mars' Roger."

"It may be only too weak in a very little while," said Roger as he surveyed the result of their labors.

Then he placed each seaman at a window which overlooked the road leading toward the old tower, while Stephen stationed himself at another.

"Keep a sharp lookout," directed Roger; "challenge any one who approaches; if they do not answer at the second summon—fire without hesitation."

He looked carefully at his pistol and placed it in his belt; then he selected a short heavy-bladed, double-edged sword and strapped it on.

"I will return as soon as possible," said he to Stephen.

"You are not going out?"

"But I am," coolly.

"Where are you going?"

"To try and get a peep at Monsieur Ravenac and his visitors. Suppose it should be as we suspect, and the noble Marquis prove to be among them. He would be much offended," with a laugh, "did not some one call upon him."

"But, seriously, why are you going there?"

"To find out, if I can, just what is going forward. It will not do to remain here and wait for them, not knowing their mode of attack, if any should be contemplated."

"It will be most dangerous," said Stephen. He stepped to Roger's side, and added, "If you are discovered you may lose your life. I am going with you."

"You are going to stay here and take charge of the men. Starbuck and his mates are faith-

ful, courageous fellows, but they require some one to direct them. That is your part."

Stephen looked at his friend for a moment, then said:

"I suppose you are right. But take care, Roger; don't rush into danger."

"Trust me for that. If it is our acquaintance the Marquis, below there, I shall be exceedingly careful; for he has promised to settle accounts with me at the first opportunity."

The youthful skipper of the brig then pressed his friend's hands tightly, and in a few moments was stealing along, in the shadow cast by the tall trees, toward the old tower; while Stephen, within, replaced the braces of planks upon the door through which his friend had passed.

Roger looked out over the bay. He could see nothing of the *Spitfire* because of the shadow in which she lay; but the British ship, under a few light sails, and with the moon hanging like a silver ball almost directly above her foremast, was still cruising to and fro at the mouth of the harbor like a great night bird with half-closed wings.

"That moon will last for some hours yet,"

muttered the boy, as he stole along, "and while it is rather bad for me just now, should any one be on the watch, still it may prove of great advantage later on."

Avoiding the patches of moonlight that rifted between the trees, the young sailor stole cautiously along. The light still gleamed redly through the lone window of the tower, and, still under cover, he drew toward it, his pistol gripped in his hand. At last he was in position to see what was proceeding within; cautiously he raised his head above the level of the window-sill and gazed into the room.

A group of armed seamen were lounging about, and near them stood an officer whose face seemed strangely familiar to Roger. But he wasted no time speculating as to the man's identity, for at a table near the window sat Ravenac, and opposite him, immaculate and faultless in attire, sat the Marquis of Glastonbury. The Marquis was speaking.

"I am very glad that my signal was seen in time to prepare you for my arrival," he was saying.

"It surprised me! I did not think that you intended to return here," said Ravenac;

"I fancied this matter was to be left entirely in my hands."

The Marquis took snuff in his usual delicate way, and rubbed his finger tips carefully with a handkerchief of spotless linen.

"I had so purposed," said he, with a shrug, "but I had not thought that this Yankee Congress would be so precipitate. As war is on, we must get possession of the cipher key at once."

"That would be easy enough if I could once effect an entrance into the house. Somehow they have suspected my design from the start; that young meddler from the American brig has brought ashore some of his men to keep guard, and they prowl up and down like watch dogs all the time."

The Marquis drummed lightly with his white, well kept hands upon the table and smiled.

"And so your secret passages failed you," said he, and there was a trace of mockery in his tone.

"So far—yes. The one upon which I depended has been walled up; apparently some one had discovered it since I have been here

last. Then I had to turn to this one, leading from this tower."

"And a pretty penny it has cost," said the Marquis. "Though I would not have minded ten times the sum had anything resulted from it."

"During my term of employment with Colonel Randall," resumed Ravenac, "I learned much about White Towers—but I could never find the door of this tower passage that opened into the house—that is, not until this very evening."

"Ah!" The Marquis's face lit up with interest.

"Yes," said Ravenac, "I found it at last. It has not been used for many years, but it will doubtless work somehow, or can be made to do so. Indeed I was in the passage cleaning the rusted mechanism when one of my men brought me word of your signal which he saw burning at sea."

Roger drew in a deep breath at this. So the long sought for door was the slab of stone behind the fireplace! It was well worth the risk he was running to learn this fact alone.

"In the few weeks that have elapsed since

I have been here I have lost much of the confidence which I had in you as a man who found the end you sought without much ado and went swiftly to it."

"I am sorry to hear that," answered the Frenchman, a sullen look coming into his sallow face.

"And," continued the Marquis, "as the time is now very limited, indeed, in which success in this enterprise is possible, I have made up my mind to accomplish it in my own way."

"With these men?" asked Ravenac, glancing toward the lounging seamen.

"With these men; and, if need be, with the hundred and fifty odd others on board the *Guerrière*."

Roger started. It now came to him like a flash that the officer in command of the armed party was the one who had boarded the *Spitfire* and impressed his passenger, John Deguyo.

"So that sea-wolf is still hanging about these coasts," was the thought that passed through his mind. "Well, I sincerely hope that she meets with an American ship of equal strength, and is blown out of the water."

"When do you think to begin your attack upon the house?" asked the Frenchman.

"My dear, Ravenac," and the Marquis gestured his distaste, "please do not dignify so small a matter by so formidable a name. Attack! Why, it is merely the catching of a couple of boys asleep in their beds, a few turns with a rope's end, and then freedom to ransack the whole of the establishment at our leisure."

"Don't make a mistake," warned Ravenac. "You will have a fight that will interest you before you gain the inside."

"I never make mistakes," smiled the Marquis. "Witness the evidence," and he waved his hand toward his followers. "I expect no resistance of consequence, yet I have come prepared for a great deal. You say they have an armed guard?"

"Yes," said Ravenac. "Three men, and brawny looking fellows they are."

The Marquis had begun to speak, but Roger did not catch even the first word, for a pair of powerful hands fell suddenly upon his shoulders and he was hurled to the ground backward. As he fell, his assailant was upon him

with the rapidity of lightning, the hands shifted to his throat and a knee pressed against his chest.

Beneath the window was a bed of yielding sand, and the struggle was noiseless. Roger held the pistol in his right hand, and because of the darkness, the man attacking him had, apparently, failed to notice this. Whoever he was, the man seemed to disdain to call to his friends within the tower; he appeared determined to take his prisoner single-handed. But had he known the mettle of Roger Dare, possibly he would have acted otherwise.

As he felt the hands clasping his throat and the knee crushing in his chest, Roger suddenly dashed his left fist into the man's face. The unknown uttered an exclamation in some strange tongue, and for an instant the breath-stopping pressure of his hands relaxed. That instant was enough for the young commander of the *Spitfire*. Like an eel he wriggled from beneath the man, and then bounded to his feet. Then the unknown uttered his first cry —a sharp yell that at once told the lad that he had to deal with the Indian whom he had seen looking from the window upon the day he

and Stephen visited the tower and talked with Ravenac in the road.

As the sharp yell of warning split the silent night, the savage leaped toward Roger; at the same instant there came the sound of overturning chairs and trampling feet from the tower. Roger waited coolly until the Indian was almost upon him; then the heavy pistol swung upward and the barrel fell upon the man's head, stretching him motionless upon the sand just as the door of the tower was flung open, a glare of light streamed upon the road and the armed seamen trooped out, their officer at their head. This latter caught sight of Roger at once, and drew his sword, while he shouted:

"At the Yankee, men! Cut him down!"

The seamen rushed forward with their bared blades gleaming in the moonlight. Roger steadied himself coolly, fired the pistol point blank in their faces, then hurled it at the head of the officer. The next instant he had turned and darted away down the road with the entire party at his heels.

CHAPTER X

THE NIGHT WEARS ON

ROGER DARE was a trained athlete, with strength, speed and wind, while the pursuing men, though hardy and much enduring, were slow upon their feet.

The consequence was that the young captain of the brig gained upon them at almost every spring, and dashing among a thick growth of trees by the roadside, he was at length lost to their view.

For a short time they kept up the pursuit; then gave it up, and went grumbling back toward the old tower. When he was sure that he had shaken them off, Roger made his way to White Towers and gave the signal which he had had the forethought to arrange with Stephen; a few moments later one of the doors opened and he was admitted.

"Well?" demanded Stephen, eagerly.

"As soon as I get my breath," said Roger,

sinking into a chair; "this sand is no easy thing to run in."

"You have been pursued, then?"

But Roger refused to speak until he had recovered from the effects of his hard pace; then he told his friend everything that he had seen, heard and experienced.

"They are actually going to attack White Towers, then," exclaimed Stephen. "In spite of all we have done to prepare against such an event, I had not quite realized that it might really take place."

"The Marquis is on the ground, and you may be sure he intends to do just exactly what he said he would do. I think we may expect a sharp fight before dawn."

"How many seamen are there from the *Guerrière?*"

"Fully a dozen, and resolute-looking fellows they are."

"We can expect no aid from the surrounding country," said Stephen; "for our nearest neighbors are some distance out of the sound of a gunshot."

"There are five of us; we have plenty of weapons and ammunition, and four thick

walls to fight behind. Then there is Cato; he can be of service in re-loading."

The old negro happened to be in the library, where this conversation took place, lighting fresh candles; and he burst out indignantly:

"'Deed, den, Mars' Roger, dis old niggah's good fo' to shoot, too! If dey's any scrimmaging wif dat Glastonbury man, or de British, I'se gwine to be in it, sho's yo' lib, sah."

The two boys made a careful round of the house and saw that everything was secure. To be sure, this had been done little more than an hour before, but still they did not feel quite safe until they had reviewed their work upon all the doors and windows and other weak places. The men were also spoken to and told to redouble their vigilance as an attack might be expected at any moment.

The tall clock in the hall had solemnly struck the hour of two, when Starbuck's gruff voice was heard calling from his post at one of the front windows:

"Skipper, ahoy."

"What is it, Starbuck?" asked Roger, as he stepped into the hall and made his way toward the man.

"There's some sort of craft coming along the road, sir."

"A craft, you lubber," growled one of the other seamen, stationed near by, "it's a whole fleet."

Starbuck strained his eyes and peered into the night intently.

"So it is," confessed he. "You always did have the best eyes on the brig, mate."

"They look to be cleared for action," said the man spoken to, whose name was Davis, "and they are bearing up as though they intended to board."

Roger looked earnestly down the road in the direction which Starbuck indicated. Though the trees overhung this, for the most part, still there were spots where the moon threw her light in broad splashes. By aid of these he was able to make out a compact body of men advancing upon the house. They seemed to make no attempt at concealment, but marched boldly forward; and as they drew nearer the sound of their voices could be plainly heard.

This angered Roger somewhat.

"They don't think it worth while to even

disguise their advance," said he to Stephen, who was now at his side. "From my adventure with the Indian at the tower they must be well aware that we are awake and awaiting them."

"From what you told me of the conversation between Ravenac and the Marquis, he seemed to think very lightly of it all, to begin with," said Stephen.

"It is the nature of the man to hold all things as beneath his contempt. But," and as Roger spoke he took the long barreled rifle from the reluctant hands of Starbuck, "I think I shall give him a slight hint that that is not always the best frame of mind in which to approach everything."

He lifted the piece to his shoulder and fired through the window. There was a cry of pain from the advancing British, and a quick scattering for cover. However, there was one man who still held to the road; with head erect he kept its very centre and walked fearlessly toward the house.

"The Marquis, himself," cried Stephen.

"He's a plucky one," said the sailor Davis, "and it's not the first time he's been under

fire. But give the word, captain, and I'll make him strike his flag."

"Don't fire," said Roger. "It looks as though he were going to say something, and it would be as well for us to hear it."

"It can do no harm," said Stephen.

Roger was correct. The elegant Marquis of Glastonbury advanced from the road with graceful dignity until he stood in the very centre of the lawn before White Towers. Here he paused, his left hand upon the hilt of his sword, his right upon his hip, his head thrown back.

"Ho, the house," he cried.

"Stand away from the window," warned Roger, fearing a ruse.

As the others obeyed, he answered the cry.

"Ahoy," he shouted, boldly presenting himself at the window.

"Ah," said the Marquis, "I am delighted to be answered so readily."

He stepped forward as though to approach the window; but Roger presented a pistol promptly, and called:

"It would be as well, my dear Marquis, if

you were to keep your ground. You can speak well enough from where you are."

The Marquis halted and laughed lightly.

"Is it possible that I am dreaded so?" he said, with his usual sneering inflection. Then he added: "With whom am I speaking?"

"When we last met," answered Roger, "you stood upon the deck of the *Little Belt* and I upon that of the *President*."

"Oh, it is Mr. Dare, then! And, may I ask, was it you who paid us the visit an hour or two ago, at the tower, below there?"

"It was."

"You are a most active and enterprising boy, Mr. Dare," said the Marquis, mockingly. "Believe me I had not expected to encounter so worthy an antagonist in this matter."

"What is your errand?"

"You are quite right, as I suppose you always are. The sooner we come to business the better for all hands. My errand to-night is, as I suppose you know, to gain possession of White Towers."

"Not so much White Towers as something that it is supposed to contain, I think."

The Marquis laughed once more.

"Your discernment is quite unprecedented," said he. "And you are right."

"And how do you propose to place yourself in possession of this house?"

"By peaceable means if possible, Mr. Dare. In my day I have seen some few deeds of violence and, believe me, peaceable means are always the best. There are fifteen seamen from his Majesty's frigate *Guerrière* within sound of my voice, not to speak of a most worthy and gallant officer in charge of them. Then there is Monsieur Ravenac, my friend, also the man of the Creek nation whom you used so roughly but a short time ago, and still again a gentleman with but one arm and an unquestioned genius for pistol shooting. Lastly there is my most unworthy self."

"You are very careful to enumerate your entire force," said Roger Dare coolly, as he leaned against the window frame and surveyed the nonchalant Marquis.

"It is very bad generalship, I admit," replied the elegant nobleman, as he smoothed his shirt ruffle in the moonlight and carefully

adjusted his stock. "However, it will show you how little chance five of you have to hold out were you foolish enough to contemplate such a thing."

"If you had the entire crew of the ship-of-war in the offing at your back," said Roger boldly, "we would still commit that foolishness of which you speak."

"Then you purpose to resist."

"We do; and to the last. We fully realize the importance of what we guard; it may possibly prove the life of this nation. And when you cross this threshold it will be over our dead bodies."

"Most gallantly spoken," laughed the other, mockingly. "But, let me assure you, most rashly spoken as well."

"You have my last word in the matter," said Roger.

"Ah, but you are not master here, remember that."

"But *I* am," cried Stephen Randall, suddenly appearing at Roger's side, "and I say the same as my friend."

In the uncertain light of the moon Roger could see that his friend was pale of face, but

that his eyes were glowing with resolution. It seemed that the young student was growing accustomed to danger and could face it with constantly decreasing timidity.

"Think well, boy!" said the Marquis, coldly, his voice filled with deadly meaning. He had heard of Stephen's nervous disposition and thought to play upon his fears. But the boy replied:

"I have thought it all out, long ago. And now stand back. If you are within gunshot when one minute has passed you shall be fired upon."

Without a word the Marquis bowed deeply, and turning walked toward the trees, where he disappeared.

Roger took Stephen by the arm and quickly drew him away from the window; almost at the same instant a crash of rifle shots came from the trees and smashed the glass in the sash above their heads.

"The fight is on," said the young master of the *Spitfire*. "So shoot whenever you see a sign of one of them, my men."

"Then here goes," cried Starbuck, who had reloaded his piece. He threw it forward and

pulled the trigger; a yell showed that the bullet had found its mark.

Not to be outdone, Davis also fired, but silence greeted his shot.

"Don't waste any ammunition," warned Roger. "We must be careful, as we may be walled up here longer than we think."

There was no sound of any sort from without for some time. At length the third sailor who was on the outlook at the other side of the house, shouted:

"Here they come!"

Roger and Starbuck sprang to his aid just as his rifle exploded. The man clubbed his piece and began to beat back a half-dozen figures that were attempting to force their way through a window. The cutlasses of Roger and his aid soon caused these to retreat, and a couple of shots from their heavy pistols made them hasten their pace considerably as they made for the trees.

"They were on me before I knew it," explained the sailor. "And they expected to have an easy thing of it from the way they began to climb in. I guess they didn't think to find any one at this side."

"Starbuck, you stay here with Barlow," ordered Roger; "you may be needed."

"If dey is free at de front side, dey should be free at dis yeah side, too," remarked old Cato as he came forward with a musket and a brace of loaded pistols. "So to make t'ings equal, Mars' Roger, dis yeah niggah's gwine to stay right heah."

"Very well, Cato," answered the boy smilingly. "We're glad to have you."

For some time after this all was silent from the outside; indeed this continued for so long that Roger began to grow restless.

"They have given up the attempt, perhaps," suggested Stephen.

But Roger would not listen to such a thing.

"Depend upon it," said he, "it only means some new trick of the Marquis. He is not the man to be beaten so easily."

"What can he do other than rush the house and attempt to force an entrance?"

"I don't know. But he is a man of resource. If one thing fails him he is likely to have another ready to put forward for trial. I think we may rest assured that he is not yet beaten."

A half hour passed, but still there was no sign.

I think they must have hauled off for repairs, captain," sang out Starbuck from his post at the rear of the house. "We cut up some of the rigging of that last lot, and we hulled a few of 'em before that."

"Keep your eye out for a sudden rush," directed Roger. "They are up to some stratagem."

He was standing at one of the front windows as he spoke; his eyes traveled away toward the old tower, and he was astonished to catch far down the road, a sudden gleam of light, which as suddenly vanished.

"Strange!" he muttered; "what can that be?"

Again came the flash, and yet again.

"Three times," said Roger. "A signal, as sure as I live." Then he shouted warningly, "Ready all!"

No sooner had his words rang through the rooms when a sudden volley from front and rear sounded, and the boat's crew of the British frigate rushed forward upon both sides simultaneously. The defenders blazed away

with their rifles, and then, as this did not stop the rush, brought their pistols into play. In reckless disregard of the flaring muzzles, a brawny tar leaped through a window and was at once cut down by a swinging sword stroke by Roger. Stephen emptied pistol after pistol in the faces of the enemy, and Davis was growling like a bear and dealing lusty blows at every head that appeared at his window.

At the rear Starbuck, Barlow, and Cato had a smaller party to contend with; but almost at the very first fire Starbuck received a bullet through his shoulder and so was partly incapacitated. However, he stood gallantly to his post and struck hard and fired often, while old Cato worked as he had never worked before, reloading the firearms and sometimes discharging one when the press without grew alarming.

The attack finally began to weaken; the British boat's crew fell back; but in a few moments they resumed firing from a slight distance. The moon was now, for the time being, obscured by a cloud-drift, and the pistols spat red and spitefully in the gloom. Roger saw at once that the enemy could not

hope to gain any advantage by such a method of fighting as this, and at last he grew suspicious that all was not well.

"I'm going to see what's going on at the rear," said he at length, to Stephen. "It seems to me that something is afoot."

"Why?" asked Stephen, as he stood, rifle in hand, at one of the shattered windows, cautiously peering out.

"I can't understand why a signal should be given from far down the road for this attack to begin; and neither can I understand why it is protracted in this fashion unless it is to gain time. As I said before, the Marquis is probably engaged in some ruse of which we know nothing."

In passing through the library toward the rear rooms, he all but stumbled across the hound crouched upon the floor.

"Frightened, Nip?" said he, for the firing seemed to have the dog much excited. "Well never mind, old dog, it will soon be over."

But the dog never raised his eyes, which surprised Roger, for the animal was a most friendly one. The heavy tail waved slowly, the ears were cocked, and growl after growl

rumbled in its throat. The boy halted with a start.

"Not the fireplace, again, Nip," said he, as he followed the direction of the dog's gaze.

A half dozen quick steps took him to the huge bricked space with its backing of stone; he listened intently, but the barking of the fire-arms within and without made it most difficult to hear anything else. So, stooping, he stepped inside the fireplace and placed his ear against the slab at its back. He caught his breath as he realized what the stratagem of the Marquis of Glastonbury was to be, for from behind the slab he could hear the smooth voice of that gentleman as he said:

"I have no more patience, Ravenac, with your secret mechanisms. You have been trying to discover a fancied spring this last half hour. Stand back, let gunpowder do the work; it is prompt and does its duty well in every instance."

Then came the hiss of a fuse and a tiny curl of smoke crept through an aperture at the edge of the slab. Roger sprang back the full length of the room; an instant later there came a dull report and the fireplace collapsed, a

ruin ; then through a jagged hole in the wall from which poured a cloud of smoke, stepped the Marquis of Glastonbury with Ravenac at his back.

A mocking smile illumined his face as he caught sight of the young master of the *Spifitre.*

"Well met, Mr. Dare," said he with a bow. "I had not hoped for this good fortune."

He turned back the lace ruffle at his wrist and the long, naked sword which he held in his hand sung shrilly as he swished it through the air.

"The pleasure is mutual," said Roger as he eyed the tall graceful figure of the man and caught the cold, relentless expression of his face. His pistol was empty, so he threw it from him, and drew his sword, the same short weapon which he had strapped to his side upon starting out for the tower.

"Your friends are kept too busy at their posts to render you any aid," said the Marquis, sneeringly, as an increase in the firing was noticed about this time.

"I hardly think any help will be necessary,"

replied Roger, quietly, as he balanced his blade in his hands, and stood ready for what might come.

Ravenac had taken no part in this conversation. Immediately upon entering the library he had darted toward a niche-like space in one of the walls. This had been filled up with shelves which were loaded with books; but Ravenac tore the volumes from their places and scattered them about the floor, after which he began feverishly tracing with one finger the painted pattern upon the wall behind the shelves. Almost instantly he found what he sought; a sort of panel slid open and with a cry he thrust in his hand.

Roger heard the cry and his eyes shifted from the Marquis to Ravenac. He gave an answering cry and sprang toward the man, but the Marquis glided between them, his blade pointed at the lad's breast.

"Hold your distance," said he, calmly. "Monsieur Ravenac has a small matter of business and does not desire to be interrupted."

Roger saw that words would be useless, and



"HOLD YOUR DISTANCE," HE SAID CALMLY

shifting his right foot forward, their swords crossed with a ring.

"You have a strong wrist," said the nobleman, as Roger put aside one of his lightning thrusts and dealt a cut with his short heavy weapon that made him guard like a flash. "A strong wrist and a steady eye."

Roger made no reply, but pressed forward; not once did he allow the other to assume the offensive, knowing well that, with the superior skill in fence of the Marquis, this would mean certain defeat for himself.

But he had not made a dozen cuts in all, when a second cry broke from Ravenac, this time a cry of rage.

"It is not there!" he shouted, whirling about, his face white and his eyes glaring. "Do you hear? It is not there! This is some of Mayhew's work!"

The words had scarcely left his lips when there came a thunderous crash of arms from without, followed by startled shouts and the sound of running feet.

"Roger," shouted Stephen, joyfully, from the hall beyond; "help has arrived. The British are running."

"Ravenac!" cried the Marquis of Glastonbury, fury and baffled hate in his voice. "After me."

With a twist of the wrist he disarmed Roger and bounded from the room, the Frenchman at his back.

Roger rushed after them. He saw them leap through a window and fiercely engage, with sword and pistol, a group of armed farmers. Then they broke away and vanished, followed by a sleet of bullets, among the trees.

CHAPTER XI

THE *SPITFIRE* PUTS TO SEA

A CLOSE pursuit was made of the fleeing British ; but at the bay-shore it was discovered that a heavily manned long boat had just landed from the *Guerrière;* and so the farmers contented themselves with emptying their guns at the boats as they pulled away for the distant frigate, carrying a few dead and quite a number of wounded with them.

The timely arrival of the rescue party at White Towers had been entirely due to chance; the British war-ship had been seen to enter those waters late in the afternoon, and as her suspicious actions gave rise to the idea that her commander contemplated an attack somewhere along the Long Island shore, the alarm was spread, and the farmers began to gather at a point about a mile below. Upon the sound of continued firing reaching them, they advanced with all haste and came

upon the scene of the struggle as already described.

When morning dawned the *Guerrière* had vanished; and as there seemed no immediate danger of any further landings, the farmers also took their departure.

"The war news only reached us during the afternoon," said one, as they were going; "so, from now on, I suppose, we will be kept busy watching for the frigates that slip up this far in the night."

During the morning Roger and Stephen paid a visit to the old stone tower; there were some cooking utensils, used by its late occupants, and some remains of food, but that was all.

"They have gone for good," said Roger, as they stood gazing about the place; "and now the first thing for us to do is to set about blocking up this underground passage, so that another enterprising Glastonbury cannot enter and take us in the back as was done to-night."

They found, in the cellar of the tower, the entrance to the passage, and made their way through it toward the house. It was a narrow, damp sort of tunnel, the ceiling of which

was very low, and progress through it was slow. Luckily they had brought a candle, and this dimly lighted their way.

"Monsieur Ravenac must have spent many discouraging moments in this place," laughed Roger, "and I'll venture to say that many's the time he was tempted to give it up before he discovered the door behind the fireplace."

Next day, masons were sent for, and they at once began the erection of a solid wall of stone work at both ends of the passage, a task which Stephen witnessed with great satisfaction. However, in the meantime, the two boys had discussed all the matters connected with the exciting affair of the night before.

"At any rate," said Roger, "they were compelled to take ship without securing what they desired. Ravenac seemed to have some reason to be perfectly certain that the cipher would be in the little hole in the wall; and," with a laugh, "he was most disappointed when he found it empty."

"I cannot understand what he meant by the exclamation you say he made," said Stephen, puzzled. "Are you quite sure he mentioned the name of Mayhew?"

"I am positive. He said: 'This is some of Mayhew's work.' Perhaps Mayhew is the one-armed man whom he had with him, and whom I never saw. He may suspect him of stealing a march upon him for some purpose."

"No; that is not it; the one-armed man's name is Spangler; I heard Ravenac address him by that name shortly after he and the Indian came here."

"Well, at any rate, they are apparently gone, and without much hope of ever finding the cipher."

"Then you do not think they will return?"

"I don't know," doubtfully. "Perhaps not; but then one cannot tell. Do you feel assured in your own mind that the paper is secreted somewhere in White Towers?"

"I do. But where?—that is the question."

Roger pondered for some time, and at last he said:

"Do you know what I would do if I were you?"

"What would you do?"

"I'd place the entire matter in the hands of the War Department—tell them the story of this attempt, and ask that they send people

here to investigate the whole matter—to knock White Towers apart stone by stone if necessary, in the search for this important document."

"Do you think they would do so?"

"I am perfectly confident of it. Indeed I think they would send soldiers to take charge whether you liked it or not, if this matter of the Marquis once reached their ears."

"That never occurred to me," said Stephen as he looked thoughtfully at his friend; "and I don't know but what you are right."

"Depend upon it, I am."

Next morning Stephen had made up his mind.

"I have written a letter to the Secretary of War," said he, holding up a sealed sheet, "and have told him everything, and begged him to take whatever action he thinks best in the matter, at once."

"Good," cried Roger. "And you will see that he will act with all promptness, as he will consider the matter most urgent."

In this Roger Dare was correct. Before many days passed a small tender, flying the Stars and Stripes, ran into the bay and dropped

anchor. A full score of regulars were landed upon the beach, as were also two officers in smart uniforms.

"I am Captain Thornton of the Seventh Infantry," said one of them to the boys, as the soldiers were halted in front of White Towers. "And my business is with Mr. Stephen Randall."

"That is my name," said Stephen, stepping forward.

The officer handed him a sealed paper which the lad read at once.

"You are to take charge of the place, then, captain," said he to the officer as he finished.

"Such are my orders. And you will pardon me if I do so at once."

While the soldiers were being stationed about in a most businesslike way, Stephen said to Roger:

"I am asked to return with the tender; I am wanted at Washington at once."

All things were arranged with Captain Thornton and his brother officer during the day; and next morning Stephen boarded the government vessel awaiting him.

"Good-bye, Steve," called Roger from the

boat alongside. "I suppose you will return before long, but the brig will not be here when you get back. The next time she runs into this bay she'll be an armed *letter-of-marque*, and carrying a crew of fifty."

"Good luck!" called Stephen over the rail. The tender had her anchor up and the newly hoisted foresails had just bellied in the breeze.

"When I return here it will be to take you to sea to fight the British," cried Roger, making a trumpet of his hands so that his words would carry to the now fast moving vessel.

Stephen waved his hand in reply; in a short time the tender had reached the open sea, and squared away upon her return run. Roger sat in the boat, drifting about the bay until his friend had vanished in the distance; then he pulled for the brig and climbed aboard. There was no need of his going ashore again; all his men were aboard and the troops had charge of White Towers. So he gave the word to up anchor and make sail; and in a very little while the staunch little *Spitfire* was plunging her way through the long rollers of the Atlantic, on her way home.

CHAPTER XII

THE BRAGGART *GUERRIERE* ONCE MORE

ROGER DARE had sailed along this stretch of coast many times, but never had he seen the shipping so thin; in fact all the way up he met but half a dozen, and these ran like frightened sea-birds as soon as his topmasts showed.

"The British ships must have been prowling hereabouts," said Roger to his first mate.

"That must be it," said the mate, "and they seem to have scared every Yankee sail into port and made the few that have ventured out afraid of their own shadows."

But upon the afternoon of the same day they came upon a fast sailing schooner whose skipper seemed more venturesome than any of the others, for he brought his craft near enough to the *Spitfire* to find out what she was; and when Roger showed his colors, the vessel came within speaking distance.

The schooner's skipper was a Yankee to

the core, and he seemed to resent the state of things.

"The people at Washington ought to send a frigate into these waters," he complained. "Here's a consarned Britisher running every mother's son of a coasting vessel up the cricks and rivers, and not a gun to fire at her. What do we pay taxes for, I'd like to know."

"What sort of a ship is she? Have you heard?"

"Didn't have to hear," snorted the Yankee; "she gave me a six hour run yesterday that made me hang out every stitch of canvas I carry. She's a smart sailer, and her crew can work her guns! See that?" and he pointed to a huge, patched rent in his mainsail. "Well, the Britisher did that; but the *Polly Ann* is handy with her heels, and so I gave them the slip at the end."

As the schooner sailed away the *Spitfire* fell into the wind once more and continued upon her course.

"I wish we had our guns on board," said the young second mate, as he paced the deck by Roger's side. He was but a few years

Roger's senior and never seemed to forget the hardship that he had suffered when impressed into the British service.

"The light guns the brig will carry would not even make an impression upon a heavy frigate," answered Roger with a smile.

"I don't know," and the mate shook his head doubtfully, "there is no telling. Captain Barry and Captain Jones did many things in the last war with England, that folks would have thought impossible. But the doing proves everything, and I think the *Spitfire* will make a name for herself!"

"I trust that you are right," said Roger, and his heart warmed at the thought. "At least we shall endeavor to make a name both for the ship and for ourselves."

At four bells in the afternoon a sail was sighted, apparently bearing down upon them. There was a good breeze and the stranger was a fast sailer; but Roger kept his course without spreading more sail; however he watched the newcomer keenly.

"She may prove an American," said he to the second mate, "and until we discover that she is not I do not intend to run."

But in a short time he was convinced that the ship was not only British, but was in fact the braggart, *Guerrière*, with her name still painted upon her foretopsail in staring letters of black.

"Clap on every rag she will carry," said the young captain, as soon as this discovery was made, "and hug the coast as much as possible."

The little crew of the brig manned the yards and spread the white sails to the breeze. The rock-bound Maine coast was plain to be seen over the port rail; far away the black rocks poked their heads above the spume that frothed about them.

"It's a dangerous run," said the first mate with a shake of the head.

"Not so much for us as for the frigate," answered the young master. He had his glass, a long, powerful affair, focused upon the British war-ship steadily, and noted that she did not venture in any further toward the shore. "I suppose they are anxiously looking over their charts and wondering how accurate they are."

"Those are eighteens she carries in her main deck battery," said the first mate, "and

before long she'll take the risk of creeping in far enough to get the range of us."

The little brig bounded from wave to wave under the press of canvas which she now carried; from the deck to her topmost yards she was piled with it, and every inch was drawing.

"The old lady is acting well," said Roger, proudly, as he noticed this. "It's just the sort of breeze that suits her."

But the *Guerrière* was a vessel of remarkable swiftness. She was French built, having been taken from that nation in an action some years before; but she had been greatly changed in trim and rigging, and was now considered one of Britain's most formidable frigates, both as to sailing and fighting qualities. If the slant and pressure of the wind suited the *Spitfire*, it also seemed to suit the war-ship; she went plunging her huge black hull through the seas, white with canvas, her decks slanting at a sharp angle to leeward, her crew at their stations, ready to open fire upon the flying brig when they got within range.

"She's gaining upon us," admitted Roger, at last, turning to the first mate.

"Yes, and she's gaining in daring, too," answered the latter. "She's a good mile nearer the coast than she was a half hour ago."

Roger had great pride in the speed of his little brig, but he knew full well that under existing conditions she could never escape the great black hawk of a frigate that was slowly closing in upon her.

"If darkness were only to settle," he muttered, anxiously, as he leaned upon the starboard rail and searched the eastern sky.

The gray forerunner of night was stretching its shadowy hands above the far off horizon line; but the red rays of the sun still lingered upon the face of the waters.

"It will be an hour before night draws on completely," he continued, still muttering to himself. "I could escape easily enough in the darkness; but he'll get the range of me before that time."

Nearer and nearer crept the frigate toward the coast. She had no difficulty in keeping even with the flying brig; her commander's only anxiety was for water enough to bring his heavy guns into play. Finally an eighteen

was fired to test the distance, the shot fell short, but so little as to make Roger's mouth tighten and his jaw set.

"She'll be knocking the splinters out of us in another ten minutes," said the first mate.

"Send her in shore further," ordered Roger.

"There's only a few feet more than we are drawing," said the second mate as he came aft with the lead. "And it shoals rapidly in some places hereabouts. We'll scrape our keel upon Davy Jones' ribs, sir, if we don't take care, as it is."

Roger paced the after deck like a trapped panther, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes never leaving the pursuing war-ship for a second, his brain awhirl with plans of escape. Finally a thought seemed to strike him, and he caught his breath sharply. He turned upon his second mate.

"Take two men for'ard," commanded he, "and stand ready to let go the bow anchor when I give the word."

The young mate's eyes widened, but he answered promptly,

"Ay, ay, sir."

As the men went forward, Roger said to the elder mate:

"I'm going to strip her to the poles. Have your men stand ready; but do it quietly."

Then some extra spars were brought upon deck and laid ready to hand. The small crew of the *Spitfire* was composed of trained and able seamen, accustomed to obey orders promptly. So at the sharp, rapidly spoken words of the young captain, the man at the wheel luffed, the anchor plunged from the bow into the sea, and the sails came in like magic, leaving the brave little vessel bare and apparently helpless. Then a boat was lowered carrying a line from the stern; the spare spars were hoisted out over the sides; then those in the boat pulled, while those at the poles shoved apparently with might and main.

From the decks of the *Guerrière* it looked for all the world as though the brig had run aground; quick orders were roared forth, and the frigate hauled off and stood away from the dangerous shoal like a frightened buzzard. She beat backward and forward, far out of range, as though uncertain what to do. At length, as Roger kept his men at the poles and

the boats, to all appearances working desperately, the commander of the frigate came to the conclusion that they would not be able to float her. He lowered and manned two boats with armed seamen, but before they could be called away darkness had settled upon the sea and they had to give the enterprise up.

"Well, sir," cried the first mate, "that did the trick. They'll not catch us now."

As soon as night concealed his operations, Roger hoisted in the boat, shipped the side poles, and quietly raised the bow anchor. Not a glimmer of light was to be seen upon the little brig, as she spread her canvas to the still fresh breeze, and filled away through the darkness like a ghost.

CHAPTER XIII

THE *CONSTITUTION* TAKES THE *GUERRIERE*

When morning dawned the *Guerrière* was nowhere to be seen, and so the saucy little brig slipped along the coast unafraid, and at last entered Casco Bay and then finally a narrow but deep creek upon the banks of which were the Dare shipyards.

Roger's father greeted him warmly. He was a bronzed, elderly man with iron gray hair and beard, and the unmistakable air of a seafarer.

"I had about given you up as a prisoner to the British," said he, as they seated themselves in the little office of the yards, the walls of which were lined with beautiful models of the schooners and brigs which had been turned out there. "What delayed you?"

Roger in a very few words acquainted his father with the happenings and present situation at White Towers. The old ship-builder whistled.

"It's a nasty state of affairs," said he. "And do you think this man Ravenac has gone for good?"

"I do not really know if he is gone at all," answered the boy. "The British frigate left those waters with both him and the Marquis of Glastonbury on board, and I suppose, the other two men, also; but it would have been an easy matter to have landed any one they chose farther down the coast."

"And so the authorities are now in possession," said the elder man, as he crossed his legs and clasped his hands about his knee. "Well, depend upon it, they will do very little. The officers in charge will obey orders to the letter, and probably keep off all prowlers, but that is all. Their methods are too cut and dried to accomplish anything original in the way of a discovery."

Roger talked with his father a long time about the affairs of the yard, the war, and the prospects of success.

"There will be no lack of privateers to prey upon the enemy's commerce," said Mr. Dare. "They are fitting out all along the coast. Every fast merchantman that is solid enough

to stand the shock of a battery of guns is being overhauled, armed and made ready for sea."

"But the navy itself, father?"

Mr. Dare shook his head.

"We have a half dozen frigates that cannot be equaled the seas over. But the British have hundreds—and mostly staunch sea-going ships, heavily armed and manned. And yet," his face brightening, "they had as many in the war for independence, and we less than we have now."

"And we won then," suggested Roger.

"We may win now," answered his father.

Of course Roger spent that night at home, leaving the brig in charge of his first officer. The boy's mother had been dead for many years, and a younger sister was the housekeeper. She was delighted to see her brother, for during the last month she had worried a great deal about him.

"Now that those dreadful British are going about in their war-ships, I suppose you will stay at home," she said, while she hovered behind his chair at supper, helping him and petting him as she was accustomed to do.

"Because they are going about in their warships is the very reason why I cannot stay at home, Flo," said the lad. "There must be some one to meet the enemy upon the sea, or else he'll be sailing into Casco Bay, and other places, and burning the roofs over people's heads."

Flora paled a little. She always knew that in the event of war Roger would be one of the first to take up arms; but now that the time was at hand it seemed even more terrible than she had anticipated. However, she said nothing against his purpose—for the girl was a sound patriot; and then again she knew that it would be of no use.

Next morning Roger and his father walked to the yard together. They passed the naked skeletons of several vessels upon the stocks; the sound of maul and adze, and the ring of the caulker's mallet mingled with the steady rasp of the saws and the chant of men as they hauled timbers, by block and fall, to place. Before a small building near the water's edge the old ship-builder paused and took a key from his pocket. Unlocking the door he and Roger entered.

At one side of the low room were a line of tarpaulin covered carronades; near them again was a long eighteen pounder also swathed with coverings.

"You know what my intentions were with regard to the *Spitfire*," said Mr. Dare.

"To mount these on board of her and sail against the British," answered Roger.

"Do you think you could manage her as a war craft?" and the ship-builder looked anxiously at his son from under his heavy grizzled brows.

"I do," returned the lad, promptly. "You know, I understand gunnery, father; my year's cruise in a government ship taught me that, and the use of small arms. And you know, also, that I understand the handling of the brig in all sorts of weathers."

Old Captain Dare was not a man given to displaying his feelings; but a close observer would have seen the proud light that came into his eyes as he clasped his son's hand.

"Very well, my boy," said he. "These barkers shall be aboard the brig before the week is done, and you shall have your *letter-*

of-marque all regularly from Washington within a fortnight."

Mr. Dare was as good as his word. The *Spitfire* was docked, her bottom scraped and re-coppered; then new spars were put in and a dress of sails, after which the guns were swung aboard. The little vessel had now a battery of six guns to a side; the long eighteen was mounted upon a pivot at the bow; a great number of cutlasses, pistols, muskets and a quantity of ammunition and round shot were also taken in.

When all was ready there appeared upon the dead walls of the town, the following placard:

SEAMEN

The *Spitfire*, letter-of-marque, is about to sail

BE BRAVE AND PATRIOTIC

Sign with her and gain glory and prize money

ROGER DARE, Master

The brig was the first privateer to sail from Casco Bay, and in her were a crew of fifty, able, hardy young sea-dogs, mostly fishermen and deep water sailors.

"There is not a handier little craft nor a likelier looking lot of men afloat," said Mr. Taylor, the first mate. He had been a warrant officer in a sloop-of-war in the war with the Barbary pirates, and was a man of experience. "And if we do not take some prizes before we are many days at sea I shall be much disappointed."

Roger stood upon his quarter-deck looking smart, natty and handsome in his tight fitting blue uniform with its brass buttons and gold lace.

"There must be many British merchantmen newly come into these waters who are not aware of the opening of the war," he said. "It is my hope that we overhaul some of them."

"Let us sight them," said the second mate, who was all enthusiasm, "and they are ours. No merchantman afloat can show her heels to the *Spitfire* now."

They coasted north; the third day out the brig took a large British ship which was making for the Gulf of St. Lawrence. A prize crew was placed in her and she was taken into Portsmouth. That same afternoon a small fleet of five sail was encountered. The *Spitfire*

headed for them, when from their midst came an armed schooner which at once opened a brisk fire. The brig at once answered this and closed in; a spirited contest was carried on, then the brig laid alongside her enemy, and Roger, at the head of a boarding party, sprang over her rail and took her within five minutes.

But no sooner had the schooner's crew thrown down their arms than a large ship flying the British flag was seen approaching under full sail.

"Mr. Taylor," directed Roger, after he had examined the stranger through his glass, "put a crew into this vessel and have her make all sail to the nearest port. I fancy that we are about to have some entertainment of this frigate's providing."

A small crew under a prize-master were put into the schooner; the British seamen were ordered into the hold of the brig, and sail was made away to the north.

"I hate to leave those behind me," said the young master, as he gazed regretfully at the distant sails of the scattered fleet of merchantmen; "but we are not strong enough to wait

for this ship coming on, so we'll have to run for it."

The captured schooner made hasty sail; but the British war-ship never troubled her; the *Spitfire* was the object of the frigate's regard, and she came bowling along in full pursuit of the trim little *letter-of-marque*, like a great hound upon the scent.

Up to this time there had been no naval engagements of any consequence since the opening of the war a few months before. Upon the land the armies of the United States had met with reverse after reverse; the garrison at Fort Chicago had been slaughtered, the city of Detroit had been disgracefully surrendered by Hull without the firing of a shot; the raw militia upon the Niagara frontier was in a state of panic; and while all of this had not as yet filtered its way through to Washington, still something brooding and pall-like hung over the nation, while the people awaited with anxiety the day that would give them a victory.

Roger Dare continued pacing his quarter-deck, his eyes still fixed upon the swiftly following ship, dead astern.

"A stern chase is a long one," he remarked to Mr. Taylor, his first officer. "Does she seem to be gaining any?"

"Yes," answered the mate, "she's overhauling us briskly, sir."

"I fancied so myself. Shake out every stitch of canvas she'll hold. The *Spitfire* can walk away from most of them; let's see if she can't leave this fellow behind."

But in spite of the additional sail and every trick that expert seamanship could suggest the war-ship still gained.

At length she was near enough for Roger to make her out clearly, and as his glass swept her he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"It's our old friend the *Guerrière*," he cried. "See, there is her name painted upon her foretopsail."

A few moments later, Taylor, who was also inspecting the frigate, said:

"What lettering is that upon her sides?"

"I had noticed that," answered Roger, "but cannot make it out."

However, the frigate drew on rapidly; soon she yawed to fire one of her bow guns at the

chase, and Roger read, painted in sprawling letters of white upon the black hull :

THIS IS NOT THE *LITTLE BELT*

The young master of the *Spitfire* laughed.

" Ah, so that affair rankles, does it ? " said he. " Well, my friend, if you should chance to run across the *President*, she might convince you that you are not much superior to the *Little Belt*, for all your braggart ways."

The oncoming ship fired another gun ; and as its rolling detonation was still echoing over the choppy sea, there came a hail from the masthead of the brig :

" Sail ho ! "

" Where away ? " shouted Taylor.

" Dead ahead, sir."

So intently had all on board the *Spitfire* been watching the pursuing frigate that they neglected to notice the appearance of a powerful looking ship, under easy sail, which was dashing the seas in showers of foam from under her stem, and approaching pursuer and pursued warily.

She had all the appearance of a great sea

bird, so confident was her trim, so cautious, yet bold, her bearing. At her peak flew the Stars and Stripes, and as Roger caught sight of its bright folds, he gave a great sigh of relief.

"Run up our colors," he commanded.

The order was obeyed, and the brig headed directly for the American vessel. It was plain to be seen that the latter was a war-ship; the mass of men who gathered at her rails and swarmed in her rigging was too great for a merchantman; and then, as they drew near to her, they saw the open ports and the double tier of grinning guns.

The people upon the *Guerrière* caught sight of the newcomer at about the same time as those upon the *Spitfire;* and the British ship fell off and then lay with flapping sails, her officers examining the other, anxiously. While they were so doing, Roger ran his vessel as near to the American as he dared to go. When he was almost under her lee, a voice hailed him from her high deck:

"Ahoy! What vessel is that?"

"The *Spitfire*, letter-of-marque, out of Barhaven. What ship is that?"

"The United States frigate, *Constitution.* Can your skipper come aboard?"

"Ay, ay!" answered Roger.

A boat was hastily lowered and the young master of the brig was pulled to the side of the frigate and went up the lines like a monkey. A fine looking officer in the dress of a captain stood upon the quarter-deck, and he greeted Roger warmly.

"So you have been having a little run from yonder very competent looking frigate, eh?" laughed he, nodding toward the Englishman which lay a half-mile away, motionless upon the sea.

"It's the second run I've had from her within a fortnight," said Roger, "and the third in a few months. The second time I slipped away from her in the darkness; but the first she overhauled me in New York bay and took a passenger out of my ship."

"Ah, so you are Captain Dare of the *Spitfire!*" The naval officer looked at him with interest. "I have heard of you from the commander of the *President.* Allow me to introduce myself: Captain Isaac Hull, at present master of this ship."

All the time he had been speaking Hull's eyes would ever and again seek the enemy. He now called to his first lieutenant:

"Clear for action."

While this was being done, the *Constitution*, with sheets eased, bore down upon the British ship. It was half-past three o'clock when all was ready, and the Yankee tars stood at their posts ready for the battle to begin.

"Now, Mr. Dare," said Captain Hull, briskly, "it's high time you were leaving us. We'll be as busy as nailers here in a few minutes more."

"If it's all the same to you," said Roger, as he paused upon the rail before descending, "I'd like to take part in this fight."

Captain Hull laughed.

"My lad," said he, and the young sailor noticed a gleam in his eyes, "at least hold your hand until you see me in trouble. This is to be a duel between the *Constitution* and the bully of our coast; and I intend to show the British what a Yankee frigate can do."

Within a quarter of an hour Roger stood upon his own deck; the brig was under a few light sails only, and her crew crowded to the

rails, eager to see the first great sea struggle of the war.

The *Guerrière* hoisted the scarlet banner of England, and calmly awaited the *Constitution's* approach. The latter came on boldly; indeed, so fearlessly did she bear down upon her foe that the British commander, Captain Dacres, looked on in astonishment. British naval officers had been taught that Americans never fought save when some trickery gave them an advantage.

"The more pluck he shows the more honor we shall gain in beating him," said Captain Dacres to the officers, who crowded about him. Then he shouted through a trumpet to his crew:

"Men of the *Guerrière*, yonder is a Yankee ship-of-war. In forty-five minutes she will be ours. But take her in fifteen and you'll get an extra four months' pay."

A genuine British cheer greeted this—a cheer that was heard on board both the *Spitfire* and the *Constitution*. Captain Hull's eyes lighted at the sound and his gaze went proudly over his ship and crew. Well did he know what bulldogs of the sea he had to

grapple with; these were the tars who had scattered the fleets of Napoleon, and reduced the proud Spaniard to adject submission.

"Once at a fair, when a boy, I saw an American raccoon tear an English bulldog into shreds. To-day I have a whole ship full of raccoons," continued Hull to his first lieutenant, "and we can't fail to gain the victory."

And as the gallant commander of the *Constitution* well knew, it would not do for him to be defeated, for, so to speak, he fought with a halter about his neck. About a month before, while sailing along the coast of New Jersey he had encountered a British fleet newly out of Halifax. This consisted of a huge ship-of-the-line *Africa*, and the frigates *Shannon*, *Belvidera*, *Eolus* and *Guerrière*. After a desperate chase, during which Hull was compelled to "kedge" and tow in a calm, the American ship escaped and ran into Boston harbor. The news of his desperate danger had reached Washington, and Hull was afraid that the timid naval office would not allow him to proceed to sea; so after he had taken on fresh water, he lifted anchor and was away again before he received any orders.

And as matters stood, if Hull was now defeated by the *Guerrière*, he would unquestionably be executed for sailing without leave.

But defeat was the last thing that the gallant seaman thought of: his men stood to their guns, his flag flew over his head, and the good planks of his ship were stout and solid beneath his feet.

"Hold your fire, Mr. Morris," he called to his first lieutenant. "I'll give the word when the time is ripe."

Nearer and nearer drew the frigates. Roger, from the quarter-deck of the brig, saw the Englishman dress his ship with flags; then he saw a puff of smoke roll from one of the forward ports, and the conflict was on.

"The Britisher is trying the range," said Mr. Taylor, who stood at Roger's side. "He's a careful marksman, I see."

At the next gun from the *Guerrière*, the *Constitution* began to shorten sail.

"There comes her canvas," cried the loud voice of the sailor, Starbuck, from the *Spitfire's* waist. "He's going to strip her like a game-cock."

The British ship squared away and then wore around until her port battery was brought to bear and discharged it at the *Constitution* as she came down the wind; instantly she wore back until her starboard battery could be brought into play, and once more her guns roared like thunder. Time after time the *Guerrière* squirmed about after this fashion and discharged her broadsides at her foe; but save for an occasional shot from a bow gun the American frigate made no reply.

"He's closing in so as to bring his shorter guns into action," said Roger Dare, as he watched the two maneuvring ships with breathless interest.

"The Englishman will cripple him aloft if he don't look out," commented Mr. Taylor, coolly. "Hull is a fine sailor, but it does not do to take too many risks."

Under the press of a maintopgallant and foresail newly spread, the *Constitution* forged up into close range, and the shots of the enemy began to take effect. An eighteen pound shot tore through the bulwarks sending great jagged splinters hurtling about, and

stretching upon the deck some of the crew of a forward gun.

A cheer went up from the tars of the *Guerrière;* but Captain Hull paced his deck, his lips tight shut, his eyes alert. Lieutenant Morris walked aft.

"Two of our men have been killed, sir! Shall I open fire?" he called, imploringly.

"Not yet, sir," returned Hull, sternly. "When we secure the range I desire, I shall pass you the word."

The *Spitfire* bore away to leeward so as not to be in the way of the larger vessel; then Roger saw the stern of the *Constitution* lapping the British ship's quarter. Apparently this had been what Hull desired, for he shouted in a voice that came booming over the surges,

"Now, men! give it to them!"

A sharp, high-pitched yell went up from the Yankee tars, only to be drowned in a broadside that made the stout ship reel. Shouts of agony came from the *Guerrière,* together with the splintering of timbers. Again and again came the dreadful discharge from the *Constitution;* her men worked at the

guns, loading, ramming and firing like smoke-blacked demons. And the British fought back furiously; the ships lay almost yard-arm to yard-arm, blazing away at each other through a cloud of smoke.

At length a twenty-four pound shot struck the mizzen-mast of the *Guerrière*, and it crashed over the side. Above the roar of the conflict Hull's voice could be heard:

"Bravo, my lads! You've made a brig of her!"

The mast dragging in the water swung the British ship across the wind. The Yankee frigate drove ahead, then ranged across the enemy's bows, raked her the length of her deck; then swinging around she brought her other battery into play and once more raked the luckless *Guerrière*. And now the latter ship's bowsprit became fouled in the American's after-rigging, and small arms began to rattle as the two vessels ground together in the swelling of the sea.

Captain Dacres called away a boarding crew, but Hull assembled a party of his Yankee tars with pistol, cutlass and pike to meet him, and the attack was not made.

Then the Americans tried to board, but the British fought desperately and this attempt also failed. More canvas was then gotten upon the *Constitution* and she was torn clear of her enemy. When a goodly stretch of water showed between the ships the American swung round to open fire once more; just then the fore and mainmasts of the *Guerrière* snapped and went trailing into the sea, leaving that once proud vessel a helpless hulk at the mercy both of her foe and the sea.

CHAPTER XIV

WHITE TOWERS ONCE MORE

After the fall of the *Guerrière's* two remaining masts the *Constitution* veered off and made rapid repairs in her cut rigging and gave her surgeons an opportunity to care for the wounded. Then she closed in once more upon her enemy, who was rolling, her decks awash, in the trough of the sea.

Only a half hour before had the Yankee frigate fired her first broadside and the result showed how deadly had been her aim. All three of the *Guerrière's* masts trailed over the side by the unparted shrouds; her hull was shattered above and below the water line, there were twenty-three dead men upon her decks; and the cock-pit was crowded with wounded.

Before resuming the engagement Captain Hull sent a boat to the wrecked frigate and inquired if she had struck, as there was no flag flying; and Dacres replied that she had,



THE GUERRIÈRE'S MASTS TRAILED OVER THE SIDE

and came on board the *Constitution* to give up his sword.

It was then almost seven o'clock, but as the *Guerrière* was in such a serious plight, all her crew and wounded were removed on board the American ship. In this work Roger Dare and his active crew lent good service and in a few hours the task was finished.

At four o'clock in the morning, just as the rim of the sun appeared above the sky line in the east, the report came from the wreck that there were four feet of water in her hold and that she was sinking. She was then set on fire and every one left her, both the American ships drawing off to a safe distance. Shortly afterward the fire reached her well-stocked magazine, and the braggart *Guerrière* was but a few blackened timbers floating upon the sea.

As the *Spitfire* carried some of the British prisoners, she accompanied the *Constitution* back to Boston. When the two vessels entered the harbor the jaunty frigate was dressed in bunting which fluttered and waved the tidings of victory to the shore. From the great guns of the forts came gruff coughs of exultation; horsemen tore madly through the

city's streets, spreading the news of victory; bells rang out joyfully; from every masthead the glorious old "gridiron" fluttered; throngs gathered upon the piers and cheered madly. But when it was discovered that the *Constitution's* victory had been gained over the hated bully of the coast, which had been for months stopping merchantmen and impressing American seamen, the entire city became a vortex of bewildering enthusiasm.

It was in the midst of this, on the first day of September, that the *Spitfire*, having been relieved of her prisoners, sailed southward in search of prizes. Five days out she fell in with another American privateer called the *True Blooded Yankee*, and they arranged to cruise together in the neighborhood of the British West Indies. Having received news of a richly laden fleet of merchantmen which had sailed for a Canadian port a day or two before, they set out in search of it.

In the dawn of the next morning they discovered the fleet, of perhaps a dozen sail, a few miles away. Before the startled merchantmen knew what had occurred they found the Yankee privateers in the midst of them, their guns

shotted, their men at quarters ready to attack. All save two of the ships were captured without any difficulty; then they were taken into the port of Charleston and condemned.

It was well into the winter when Roger made sail northward once more. After sharing the rich booty with the *True Blooded Yankee*, he had parted company with her; so now as he went bowling along he made up his mind to see Stephen Randall at Good Ground, then back to Casco Bay, to see his father and sister, and also to refit.

When he sighted the shores of Long Island a dense snow was falling; running into the little bay, which was badly choked with ice, he fired a gun to let Stephen know of his arrival, if he had not already sighted the brig. The whole country, roundabout, was white with snow; the old stone tower was grotesque and swollen with the clinging particles; the roads were deep with drifts. As the *Spitfire's* long boat nosed its way ashore through the drifting ice, a voice, having that strange far-off effect that falling snow always causes, reached the ears of the brig's young master.

"Hello-o-o!"

"Ahoy!" answered Roger, standing up in the stern sheets, and gazing eagerly ahead.

A thickly muffled figure was running toward the water's edge, gesturing frantically. As he gazed Roger made out a second figure, apparently in pursuit of the first. Both were covered with the falling snow, and through the heavy veil then settling earthward they looked ghostly and gray.

"Hello-o-o!" again sounded the voice dimly through the snow.

And no sooner had the last notes died away when the pursuer halted, raised his arm, and the red flash of a pistol, followed by a snapping report, startled the occupants of the boat. The pursued one staggered, stumbled and then fell headlong into a drift; he who had fired the shot stood motionless for a moment, then turned and raced away in the direction from whence he had come.

"Pull hard, men!" cried Roger Dare. The men bent their backs, and the long boat smashed through the drifts; Roger drew his pistol and looked carefully at its primings; when the prow touched the frozen shore he leaped out, and followed by the boat's crew,

he dashed for the spot where the stricken man had been seen to fall.

But to his astonishment no one was to be seen; they searched the vicinity thinking to find the man completely covered by the snow; but to no purpose. He had vanished.

The men stared in astonishment, and Starbuck, who was in the crew, said:

"Now shiver my hull, but here's a go! We see two crafts in the offing, one making all sail after the other, then one fires a broadside and the other goes down like a ten pound shot. But when we come to drag for him, he's gone just as clean as the ghost of Hamlet's father that the book tells about."

They searched all about for a half hour longer; then Roger took Starbuck and Davis, telling the others to pull back to the brig, and made his way toward White Towers. The snow continued to fall heavily; the roads were knee deep in it and the naked limbs of the trees were loaded until they drooped toward the earth.

In a short time the young skipper of the *Spitfire* and his two followers came in sight of White Towers, and they paused with gasps of

astonishment. When they had left, the summer before, a stately building had reared its white walls among the trees, presenting every appearance of plenty and comfort. Now they gazed upon a bleak, cheerless semi-ruin. Nothing seemed to be left save the roof and walls; the doors and windows were gone, even to the frames, and the snow drifted into the interior and piled up in heaps in sheltered corners.

"What does it mean?" exclaimed Roger as he gazed with wondering eyes at this surprising sight. "Why, when we left, the troops were in charge!"

"That was a good six months ago, captain," said Starbuck, with a salute. "And many things can happen in that time."

They slowly approached the house. Roger would not have been surprised to see Stephen emerge from one of the gaping doorways. But he did not. Not a sound was heard about the place. They entered, and after examining the rooms on the first floor they ascended the remains of a staircase and inspected those above.

Almost all the furniture had been removed;

what had not, was broken and scattered about. Some of the walls had been stripped of the very last vestige of plaster; rubbish and litter were everywhere.

"The place must have been attacked," said Roger. "An English vessel probably ran into the bay during the night, and this," with a wave of the hand, "is the result."

Davis shook his head, sadly.

"It was a fine old place," said he, "and I often used to take pleasure in looking at it when we put in here."

"The craft has been boarded by pirates, keel-haul me if she ain't," said Starbuck. "The British would not stop at much, the swabs! Nobody but out and out pirates would rake a defenseless enemy like this. And where is Mr. Randall?"

"It's impossible to even guess," answered the young captain, a vague fear at his heart.

"He's been made to walk the plank, maybe," suggested the sailor, as he fumbled with the heavy hilt of his cutlass. "There is no telling, sir."

Roger made his way down the stairs once more, and the seamen followed him. He

stood for a long time, sadly regarding the once beautiful house; suddenly Davis touched him upon the arm.

"There is some one coming, sir," said the man.

Roger followed the pointing finger with his eyes. Against the white of the snow a figure was moving toward them. So dense were the falling flakes that he could not make out even the general outlines of the newcomer. Recalling the scene at the bay shore upon his landing, he loosened his pistol in his belt and his men did likewise.

Nearer and nearer drew the man; Roger fancied that there was a dispirited droop to the head and a lagging drag to the feet; and as each step shortened the distance between them, a sense of recognition came over him. Then, suddenly, feeling that he was right, he sprang forward with hands outstretched.

"Cato!" he shouted.

"Mars' Roger," came the mournful answer; then as their hands clasped Roger searched the black old face before him for news of what had happened.

"Stephen?" he said in a tone of breathless

interrogation; but the old negro shook his head, mournfully.

"I don' know nothin' 'tall 'bout Mars' Steve," he answered, slowly. "'Deed, sah, dis po' old niggah don' know nuffin' 'bout nuffin' at all."

"What do you mean?" cried Roger, impatiently. "Did not Stephen return from his trip to Washington?"

"Oh, yas, sah. He don' come back safe an' sound. But 'bout a month ago, sah, he don' disappear."

"He disappeared?" cried Roger, incredulously.

"Sho's yo' bohn, sah," declared the old servant. "Ain't see a sign ob him since. He don' gone as quick and as complete as dough de earf don' opened and swallered him."

"But what has happened here at the house?"

The old negro gazed sorrowfully at the dreary looking walls and empty windows.

"De sogers done dat, sah."

"Soldiers! Then there has been a landing of British troops!"

"No, sah. It wan't Britishers. It was de

'Nited States soldiers what come here when yo' lef' las' summah. Dey sta'ted sea'ching fo' somfin', Mars' Roger, an' fo' long dey had de whole ob White Towers looking like she is jes' now."

"Oh, I understand. But that does not account for Stephen, though."

"No, sah. He was helping 'em to make a ruin outen de place," indignantly, "and sho'tly aftah dey don' gone away he disappeahed." The old man shook his head from side to side, and there was a quaver in his voice.

"When he went away he must have left some sort of a message for you."

"Not a line. When he didn't come back dat night I was s'prised, sah, but when he did not show he'se'f at all I was jest flabbergasted. 'Tain't like Mars' Steve to do a fing like dat, sah ; no indeed, it ain't a bit like him."

Roger was as much astonished and dumbfounded as the ancient servant ; he could not understand it ; as Cato had said it was entirely unlike Stephen to do anything of this sort. There was one thing uppermost in his mind when he turned to the old man and said :

"Do you think anything has happened to him?"

"Does yo' mean an accident, sah?"

"That, or anything else."

Cato slapped his chest and arms to rid himself of the snow that clung to him; then he came nearer to Roger and said in a hushed voice, with many frightened glances about,

"Dey's mighty queah fings going on around heah, Mars' Roger; mighty queah fings. Dey's killin' goin' on, sah!"

Once more Roger's thoughts went to the scene which he had witnessed upon the shore; he felt an icy thrill go through his blood, and a sense of dread crept over him.

"Killing, Cato! Tell me what you mean."

"I means jest what I says, Mars' Roger. Dey's strange doin's 'bout White Towers; fo' since de sogers and Mars' Steve don' lef', de man what once lived at de old stone tower hab come back."

"Ravenac!"

"Yes, sah, dat's de man. An' he fotched de odders wif him, Mars' Roger, de red skin," lowering his voice to an awed whisper, "and de man wif one arm."

"But why have you not warned the countryside of the presence of these men? They are enemies to the nation and should be taken and imprisoned."

"I don' told all 'bout dem, sah, jest as soon as I found out dat dey was heah. De fahmahs hunted dem fo' free days and nights wif dogs and guns, but could not cotch dem. And den dey say dat I am an old fool niggah, and dat dey ain't nobody heah at all. But dey is, Mars' Roger," with eager energy. "I sees dey feet marks sometimes in de snow; and mo' den once I see blood stains, as well."

A shiver crept over Roger; and the two seamen, who had been listening to all this, shook their heads and muttered under their breaths.

"Blood stains!" exclaimed the young skipper of the *Spitfire* as he clutched the old man's arm with powerful grip. He was about to proceed, but his words were interrupted by an echoing gun shot, followed by a yell behind them. From behind a low wall, almost buried in a snow-drift leaped a man, his hands clawing at his chest, then he spun around like a top, fell upon his face and lay still.

CHAPTER XV

THE MAN WITH ONE ARM

THE two seamen leaped toward the spot where the man lay; Roger shielded his eyes against the falling flakes and strove to make out who fired the shot. But it had come from among the snow laden trees, and the marksman was invisible.

However, drawing his pistol, Roger sprang away through the drifts toward the spot from whence the shot had sounded. It was slow going, for at places he sank up to his waist; and his exertions were unrewarded, for he found nothing, not even a footprint. He returned to his men, and found them silently regarding the fallen man.

"How is he?" asked the lad.

"Dead, sir," said Starbuck, touching his cap. "The shot took him full in the back, sir; and I don't believe he ever moved after he fell."

Roger gazed at the dead man; the sailors

had turned him over and a clear view of his face was to be had. He was a thick set, bearded fellow, dressed like a sailor and with small gold rings in his ears.

"Do you know him?" Roger asked of Cato. But the old negro shook his head.

"No, sah, nebber seed him befo'. But he's one ob dem, I 'spects."

"One of whom?" Roger gazed at the speaker sharply.

"One of dose villains dat dat man Ravenac done got wid him."

"Oh," said Roger, "then there are more than the original three."

"Oh, glory! yes, sah! Dey must be a half dozen mo' ob dem. I's suah ob dat f 'om de footprints in de house, and on de lawn heah." He shook his head, puzzled and mournful as one who has given up all hope. "But it's too much fo' an old niggah to und'stan', Mars' Roger. Dey all don' come heah togeddah, and now dey's trying to kill each oddah."

"Strange!" said Roger. His brows were gathered in a frown and he gazed broodingly at the dead face before him. "It is something of a puzzle, Cato; but depend upon it, we'll be

at the bottom of it before the *Spitfire* leaves the bay."

The old man's face grew brighter. Roger Dare had always inspired him with confidence; and he said:

"If yo' says yo'll do it, Mars' Roger, it's jest as good as done, sah."

Roger smiled, and patted the faithful servant upon the shoulder.

"But come inside, Cato; it's as cold as it well can be out here. We'll sit by a warm fire, and then you can tell me all. Come along, men."

He started toward White Towers, but Cato laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

"Dis way, sah, if yo' please," said he, pointing in the direction whence he had come. "Dey is no paht ob de old house dat's fit to lib in now; and since Mars' Steve's gone I libs at de little house down by de crick."

Roger had not altogether realized the condition of ruin to which the fine old house had been reduced until he heard these words. But he made no reply, following the old negro in silence, the two seamen remaining behind long enough to temporarily cover the

body with snow. The house that Cato occupied had once been the dwelling of the gardener, and stood no great distance from the great house, upon the banks of a small creek, now tightly frozen.

The apartment into which Roger was led was furnished with some of the things taken from the dismantled mansion; a cheery fire was burning in an open grate, a big chair was drawn up near to it, and some books lay upon a table near at hand.

Roger looked at these and recognized them immediately as great favorites of Stephen's.

"One would think that Steve had just stepped out of the room for a few moments," said the young sailor. "Everything is just as he would have it were he here."

Old Cato looked deeply gratified.

"Mars' Roger," said he, and there was a tremble in his voice, "I'se mighty glad to heah yo' say dat, sah; 'deed I is! I tried to keep dis yeah room looking jest dat way. 'Case, sah, I finks dat maybe Mars' Steve will done come home befo' long, and I wants it to seem as much like home as I can."

"Cato," spoke Roger, "you are a good,

faithful old fellow, and Steve is lucky to have such a one to look after his affairs here at home—for I suppose this would be his home if he came."

"'Deed he would, sah; he'd lib heah in dis cottage till de Towers was don' fixed up again, dough it am not de right kin' ob a place fo' a real young gem'man lak Mars' Steve."

Roger seated himself in the big chair and warmed himself at the fire of pine logs that roared and crackled up the chimney; Starbuck and Davis had come in and were now in the kitchen enjoying the warmth of a second fire. Cato stood near Roger, anxious and grave faced.

"Sit down," said Roger, "but first draw your chair up near the fire."

"In jest a minute, Mars' Roger," said the old servant hastily. "I'll get yo' and de sailor men a cup ob tea; it's pow'ful cold, sah, and dis niggah knows yo's chilled fro."

Despite Roger's protests he insisted in brewing a steaming pot of tea for Roger and one for the seamen in the kitchen; then he placed plates of warmed biscuits before them. When all was done, and Roger sat sipping his tea

and nibbling at the biscuits, Cato consented to seat himself at the fire and tell his story.

The soldiers sent from Washington had remained no great while at White Towers. Two officials of the war office had arrived a few days later, and when Stephen returned from his interview with the Secretary of War the mansion was almost denuded. Cato had protested with tears in his eyes; and imagine his astonishment when Stephen, upon his arrival, instead of putting a stop to it all, rather assisted in it. When everything had been searched dozens of times the soldiers were called away; the war office had finally made up its official mind that the mansion contained nothing of importance to the nation.

Upon their departure Cato had fancied that their troubles were about over; but almost immediately afterward Stephen disappeared, and he was left alone upon the great estate, a prey to all sorts of evil forebodings.

"And then Ravenac came with his men," said Roger, as he stared into the deep, red heart of the fire and rubbed his palms together thoughtfully.

"No, sah, not Ravenac."

Roger looked up at the old negro questioningly.

"Ravenac he come second, sah. De man wif one arm, he come first; and he hab pow'ful bad people wif him, Mars' Roger. And den a little while afterward Ravenac came and bring dat Injun and some odders. And no sooner do dey come den I begans to see lights flarin' in White Towers in de dead ob de night; and sometimes I heahs feet running down de roads when I sits heah and ebberyfing else is still. Den, sah, maybe dey's a shot, and somebody screams; and den all is still once mo'."

"What do you make of all this?"

"I dunno, sah; dey's fighting 'tween deyselves 'bout somefing, I suppose."

"And you say that sometimes you have seen blood stains?"

"Yes, sah, in de snow. And once I saw some in de library ob de big house, Mars' Roger; it was a great splotchy fing by de do' and went trailing out at a window and 'cross de lawn toward de trees. It was in de early morning dat I see dat, and I tells yo', sah, dis po' old black man was most pow'ful scared!"

During the entire afternoon Roger sat talking to the old servant and learning all that he knew of what had happened during the absence of the *Spitfire.* As evening drew on the lad sent his two men back to the brig with instructions to say to Mr. Taylor that he was not coming aboard until morning.

Old Cato cooked his supper with much care at the great kitchen fireplace; then he laid a snowy cloth upon the table at Roger's elbow, placed a delicate china and silver service upon it, and stood behind his chair attentively while he ate.

The evening was succeeded by night; the snow still fell heavily; the wind moaned among the trees and about the corners of the house, driving the falling snow before it and heaping it in huge drifts against the walls and in fence corners. When the old clock upon the mantel struck the hour of twelve, Cato climbed to his bed in a sort of loft over the kitchen, and Roger was left alone.

The boy threw some more pine logs upon the fire and sat watching them crackle and blaze in moody meditation. He was in no humor for sleep; the news that he had heard,

the moaning of the storm and the stillness of everything else caused queer fancies to flit through his mind. Somehow he could not take his thoughts from the foreign looking man who lay beneath the snow before White Towers. His imagination conjured up the soft flakes as they fell and drifted and eddied about the dead man's shallow grave.

The thought came to him that perhaps his friend Stephen was lying under the white drifts somewhere; perhaps he had lost his life as had this stranger by a shot from cover. Roger sprang to his feet with a cry.

"No, no!" he said, "I must not think of such things! Steve is all right! He is off upon the scent of something, and perhaps has not had a chance to send Cato any word."

He paced up and down much disturbed. There came a sudden gust of wind that made the windows rattle and a dash of sleet came against the glass.

"It's getting colder," he said to himself. "The flakes are changing to sleet."

Once more the icy particles pattered against the panes; and again the wind howled dolefully. The iron-like branches of trees near by

bowed beneath their snowy weights and creaked in the blast. But amid it all a strange undertone reached the ears of the young master of the *Spitfire*, a quavering staccato that could only be a human voice. The boy bent his head, listening intently; yes, there it came again—a gasping and sobbing sound, now, that wheezed, and rose, and fell in the intervals when the wind ceased from moaning.

"What can it be?" breathed Roger, his hand going instinctively to his pistol. "It is a man's voice, and he seems to be in distress."

Then came an entirely different sound. It was also a human voice, but it was loud and harsh and threatening. There was a short pause; the wind wailed mournfully and above it rose a sharp scream of pain.

Roger plucked his pistol from his belt and leaped toward the door; but with his hand upon the latch he paused. The unmistakable "swish, swish" of a person forcing his way through the deep drifts toward the house reached his ears; so he fell back, warily, his pistol cocked and ready in one hand, his other reaching out to snuff the pair of guttering candles.

The light dimmed and then flared up as a knock sounded upon the door—a sharp, assured knock that instantly informed the young sailor that the newcomer was a man of resolution, came he for good or ill. Roger's heart leaped, and his blood thrilled at the sound; it was as a challenge; and instantly he cried out:

"Come in!"

The latch lifted and the door swung inward; a blast of wind and snow whirled into the room, extinguishing the candles and sweeping up the great chimney with a roar. The blaze of the burning pine logs leaped and danced, and the ruddy glare from them fell upon the man who stood in the doorway. There were particles of ice mingled with his thick dark hair and his shoulders and hat rim were thick with snow; as he turned to close the door behind him his long cloak slipped from his shoulders and Roger saw that his left sleeve was empty.

It was the man with one arm!

CHAPTER XVI

FACE TO FACE

When the one-armed man turned, facing Roger, they gazed for a moment into each other's eyes.

"The night," said the man, composedly, "is a wild one."

"I agree with you," answered Roger, not a whit behind him in coolness; "and on such a night no honest man should be abroad."

"Truly spoken; and more especially no honest *wounded* man."

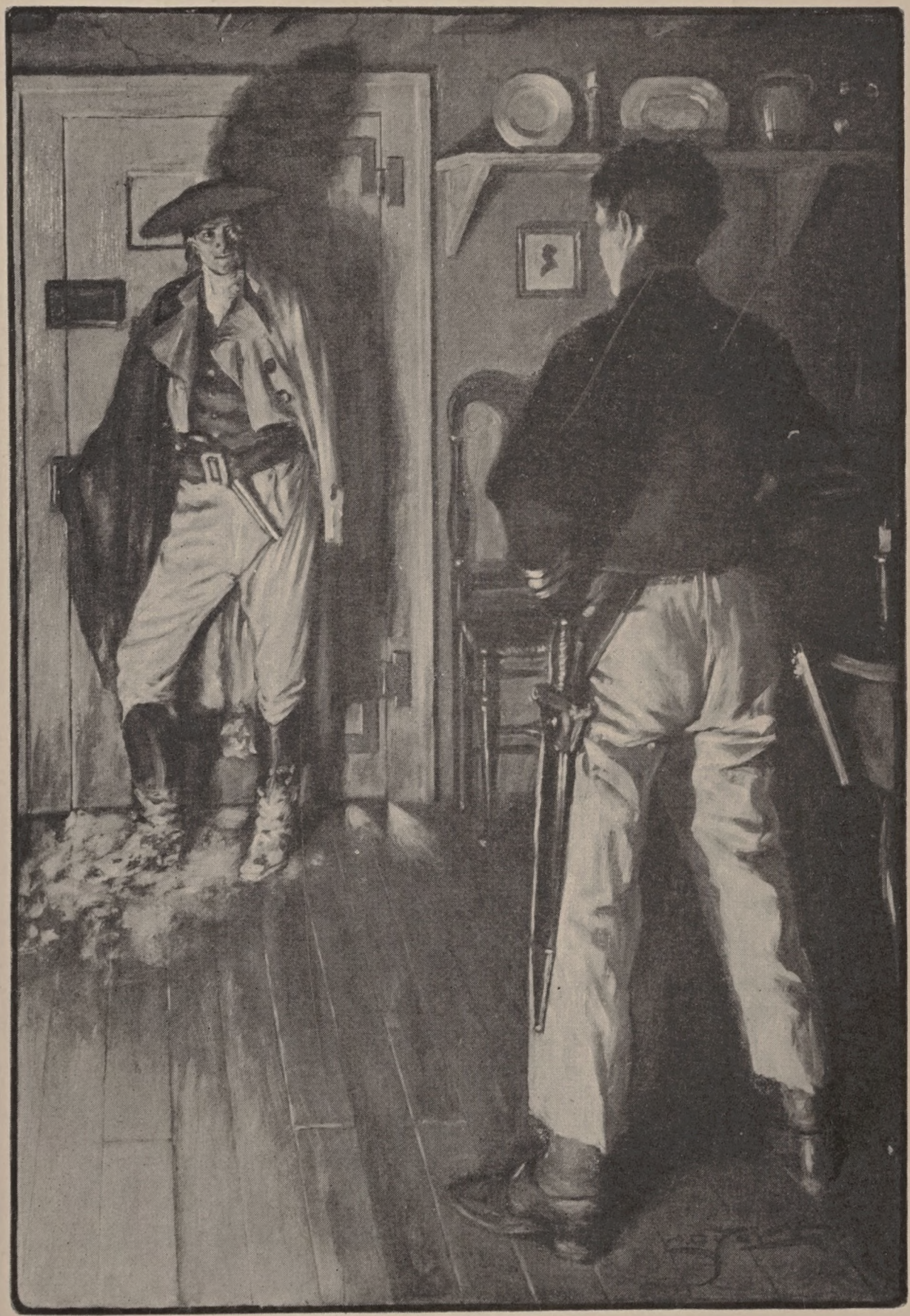
The tone in which this was said made Roger regard the man still more sharply, if that were possible.

"What do you mean?" said he.

"There is a friend of mine outside there," answered the one-armed man, "and I fancy that he is in need of some attention."

Roger suspected some trap. He paused before answering.

"Bring him in," said he, at length.



He suspected some trap

"I fear that he is unable to walk. If you would be so good as to lend me your aid we could manage him. As you see ——" and he tapped his empty sleeve significantly without finishing the sentence.

Roger stood looking at the man with unconcealed suspicion in his face. Then he thrust his pistol into his belt in such a fashion as would render it immediately available.

"Very well," said he. "I will help you bring him in."

The man laughed. There were deep, hard lines about his mouth and under his eyes that showed at their worst at such times, and gave him an ill favored look.

"You intend leaving little to chance," said he, dryly.

"On the contrary," answered Roger, "I am leaving a great deal to chance. The doings of yourself and friends have reached my ears; how do I know that when I step across yonder threshold that I will not be shot down in my tracks?"

The man looked at the lad thoughtfully; then he said:

"You are quite right."

"However," went on Roger, boldly, "if there is a wounded man out there in the storm, I will take the risk. Lead the way."

The man laughed once more; it was a short, harsh sound with little mirth in it, but quite a note of admiration.

"You have courage," he remarked; then he threw open the door, bent his head to the blast, and stepped out into the night.

Roger Dare was at his heels, his cocked pistol held ready, his eyes striving to penetrate the darkness, and the veil of whirling sleet. But he could see little; the leaping of the log fire within threw a track of rose colored light across the snow, and directly in the path of this lay a man.

The one-armed man paused as he reached the wounded one.

"If you will take his shoulders," said he to Roger, "I will take his feet. He cannot walk, and I had a difficult job in getting him this far."

Without a word Roger stooped and raised the man, the other assisting as well as his crippled condition permitted; then together they bore him into the house. After he had

been made comfortable, Roger watched the one-armed man as he deftly cut away the clothing of his friend, and coolly examined a gunshot wound in his side. The injured one groaned and complained constantly but the operator paid not the slightest heed to him.

"Rather a nasty affair," said he, at length, to Roger.

"Yes," agreed the boy; "and it has bled a great deal. He must be very weak."

"He was not able to put one foot before the other. I had to drag him through the snow all the way from ——"

He paused suddenly; his eyes flashed the boy a searching look, then he turned and began dressing the wound and bandaging it up. Roger helped him in this, and noted with surprise that the man carried all the necessary things for the work in a small bag strapped to his belt.

"You seem to be prepared for these little emergencies," said the boy, after the work was finished, and the wounded man was resting near the fire and seemingly disposed to sleep.

"I am seldom unprepared for anything," said the one-armed man. He stood with his

back to the fire, enjoying the warmth; his sharp, narrow eyes never left the face of the boy for an instant.

"The wound that your friend carries was recently inflicted, I notice," said Roger, seating himself astride a chair, his arms resting upon its back, giving the man look for look.

"Ah! you have some familiarity with gunshot wounds."

"A very little," answered the boy, calmly. "But that is not altogether the point which I should like to discuss with you."

"No?" inquiringly.

"No. I have only been hereabouts for a few hours, and in that time I have heard two shots fired; the first struck down a man whom I could not afterward find, the second killed another who is now buried out there in the snow."

"Well?" said the man with one arm, quietly.

Roger noted that he was in no way fluttered; indeed his voice was as steady, his manner as composed as it would be were he discovered engaged in some less mysterious occupation.

"As I said a very few minutes ago," said Roger, "the doings of your friend Ravenac and yourself have been told me." His fingers drummed lightly upon the back of the chair as he spoke, and his steady eyes fixed themselves upon the man's face. "It is my opinion that these strange pursuits in the night, the deadly shots from cover, require some explanation."

"And suppose," asked the other, "I do not choose to explain?"

"I don't suppose that your determination, one way or another, will affect me in the least," answered the boy. "There is no doubt in my mind but that you are engaged in a matter calculated to injure this nation; and that being the case I feel it my duty to hand you over to those who can deal with you."

The man with the one arm threw back his head and laughed.

"Do you hear that, Morly?" he cried, turning to the wounded man. But the latter was asleep; then the one-armed man gave his attention to Roger once more.

"I fancy," said he, "that the authorities

would be somewhat astonished were you to bring me to them, a prisoner."

"And pleased, too, I have no doubt. And I propose to afford them both the astonishment and the pleasure as soon as morning dawns. But, in the meantime, sit down and make yourself as comfortable as possible, and tell me the meaning of this secret warfare that seems to be going on between Monsieur Ravenac and yourself."

"The old negro is sharper than I gave him credit for," said the man, as he seated himself in the big chair near the fire. "Our little affairs have been conducted so quietly that I had not supposed any one had noticed them."

"The one of this afternoon was not very secret. What became of the man who was pursued and shot upon the bay shore?"

The one-armed man smiled and waved his hand toward his wounded comrade. Roger nodded his head. "I rather expected that," said he. "I judged that he was hit by the way he fell."

"But not so badly but that he was able to conceal himself in an old drain until you and your men had gone," spoke the other. "And

after I had settled the account with the man who wounded him I hunted him up, and after struggling for hours through the snow, managed to get him here."

"You settled the account with the man who wounded him," repeated Roger, slowly. Then he pointed to the window. "And that is he, out there, I suppose."

"You are right."

"You shot him down in cold blood!" exclaimed the lad in horror.

The man smiled once more; the firelight played fitfully upon the deep, hard lines about his mouth and eyes; his expression, as he gazed at Roger, was a curious one.

"If I had not done so," said he, "you would not be alive at this moment."

Roger stared, but said nothing.

"His rifle," continued the man, "was poked across the top of that all but buried wall and he was drawing a bead upon you when I fired."

"Ah!"

"You are surprised, I see."

"Not that that man," and Roger motioned toward the window against which the driving

sleet was rattling, "should fire at me, but that you should think it worth your while to save me."

The man leaned back in his chair and regarded the lad steadily.

"I knew you to be Roger Dare of the brig *Spitfire*," said he. "And I was told to give an eye to you if you returned here."

Roger leaned forward, astounded as he exclaimed:

"By whom?"

"By Stephen Randall, before he went south."

For a moment there was silence. Roger's brain surged with conflicting thoughts. The thing seemed impossible; yet there was something in the man's face that seemed to compel belief.

"This is a difficult thing to credit," said he, slowly, after a space.

"I am aware of that," returned the other, speaking quietly; "and as I had little hope of convincing you that I spoke the truth, I did not tell you this at the start."

"You say that Stephen Randall has gone south."

"Yes."

"And why?"

"To search for a man named Mayhew."

"Hah!" Roger's eyes narrowed warily; he felt that here he was upon unknown ground and must be careful. The other noticed this, and smiled.

"I see," said he, "that to secure even a small part of your confidence, I must tell you everything."

"Yes," said Roger, "and you must tell it very plainly."

"I intend to do so. And I will begin by informing you that I am an officer in the secret service of the War Department, and that I am here upon the business of that department. See," and he drew out a paper which he handed to the astonished lad, "here is the proof of what I say."

The document was signed by the secretary of war and directed one Parker Mason to take whatever steps he thought necessary in the recovery of the missing cipher of the late Colonel Randall. Roger returned the paper.

"And you are Parker Mason?" he inquired.

"I am."

"Your part in this matter is not altogether clear to me," proceeded the lad. "I cannot quite reconcile your actions with what you pretend to be."

"Let me relate the entire story; then you will not find it so hard to credit what I have already told you."

The man paused for a moment to collect his thoughts; and then proceeded.

"When it was first learned that Colonel Randall had left behind a copy of his cipher key to the coast defenses, I was at once acquainted with the matter and told to go ahead and do what I could to find the hidden paper. I was making ready to come to White Towers to search the place when I was approached by the man Ravenac. I had long known him as a man who had more than once sold government secrets to the British and had carefully cultivated his acquaintance. Of course he did not know the truth about me; indeed, he fancied that I was of the same stamp as himself.

"It was in this manner that Washington was advised of the knowledge that the British minister had in the matter of the cipher.

Ravenac had been engaged by the Marquis of Glastonbury because he professed to know where the cipher was concealed, and I was at once taken up by the Frenchman to render him assistance in case he should need any. Well, we came here, and what followed you know as well as I. On the night of the attack upon White Towers I neglected to follow Glastonbury and Ravenac on board the British frigate in the bay, and at once came under suspicion. I was of no further use as a spy upon them, and so came here as a sort of guard, with a half dozen men, as soon as the soldiers were withdrawn."

"To guard against what?" asked Roger.

"Against that which occurred at once," returned the man with one arm. "Ravenac immediately returned, and there began, as you have called it, I think, a kind of secret warfare. It was my intention to allow him a free run of the mansion, and to take advantage of his professed knowledge of its secret places."

"In other words, you were perfectly willing that he should find the cipher, so that you might seize upon it."

"Exactly. And so he came to understand

the situation. The men whom Ravenac has with him are mostly foreigners, and a murderous lot they are. Time and again have I and my men been set upon by them. The incident of this afternoon upon the shore of the bay is a case in kind. I saw your brig about to enter the bay and called to one of my men to find out if it were you or no. He was hardly out of my sight when I heard his cry and afterward the shot. I climbed a tree to take an observation," as he spoke the man held out one leg and Roger saw that he was armed with climbing irons; "and it was from that vantage that I saw the attempt made upon you, and picked the assassin off."

"You were in a tree top, then!" exclaimed the boy; "I never thought to look there."

"So I observed," smiled the man with one arm; "and the drifts effectually covered my footprints, so there was no danger from that source either."

Roger sat in silence for some time pondering over what he had just heard. The man seemed sincere, but there was a lurking doubt in the young sailor's mind; at last he asked:

"How did Stephen Randall come to go south in search of the man Mayhew at this time?"

"I knew, from information supplied me by the War Department, that Mayhew was somewhere upon the coast looking to the defenses of the southern cities."

"Who and what is Mayhew?"

"He is a lieutenant of artillery, and was once secretary to Colonel Randall."

"Ah!" A rush of understanding seemed to sweep over Roger. "And it was you who told Stephen that Mayhew was to be found upon the south coast."

"It was. And he started for Mobile as soon as he received the information." Roger said nothing, but sat looking at the speaker fixedly. The man also maintained a silence for a few moments. Then he said:

"It is easily seen that you distrust me—that you doubt every word that I have said. But I think I can convince you in the end that I speak the truth. From some words dropped by Ravenac in your hearing upon the night of the attack upon White Towers, young Stephen Randall fancies that Lieu-

tenant Mayhew has some knowledge of the whereabouts of the cipher key."

The man bent forward in his chair. "Does it not show that I, at least, had the confidence of Stephen Randall for him to tell me of what Ravenac cried out that night in his disappointment."

"Yes," admitted Roger, slowly.

The man seemed pleased at this candid answer and said:

"I am glad to hear you say that. It shows that you are at least inclined to admit that I might be speaking the truth. And I am. I am Parker Mason, and am employed by the government to ——"

He never completed the sentence, for there came a heavy report, the smash of glass at a window and a bullet flattened itself against the stonework of the fireplace. A harsh voice cried out:

"Then, take that!"

With a spring Roger had thrown open the door, pistol in hand, and leaped out into the night. Another report rang out as he fired at the dim figure bounding away amid the

whirling snow. But owing to the darkness the ball went wide.

"It was the voice of Ravenac, himself," said the one-armed man, coolly. He now stood at the lad's side, also with a pistol in his hand, and continued: "But he missed his aim."

"He did more than that," said Roger as they went in and closed the door.

"Indeed."

"He has convinced me by that shot that you are what you say you are," said the young captain of the *Spitfire*, as he held out his hand, frankly. The other grasped it, smilingly.

"Then," said he, "it was a most timely shot."

CHAPTER XVII

THE MARQUIS BRINGS A PRISONER

The shot fired through the window at the one-armed man was proof conclusive to Roger that he was all that he claimed to be; and if anything were lacking, the exclamation of Ravenac upon firing the shot supplied it.

So, his suspicions having vanished, Roger sat down with the man at the blazing fire and exchanged experiences with him. The logs crackled and threw out a cheerful glow about the room; without the wind continued to wail shrilly through the darkness and to dash the gusts of sleet against the window panes. Now and then the wounded man groaned and stirred uneasily in his sleep.

As they continued to talk they heard a creaking of the stairs, and old Cato stood before them, a night-cap upon his head and an expression of alarm upon his face. Upon the firing of the shot he had rushed down; but upon Roger's assuring him that all was well,

the old servant had gone back to his bed, though not without many a backward glance at the one-armed man and his wounded comrade. Now his voice had a quaver of complaint in it.

"Mars' Roger," said he, "dar's queer doings about dis yeah house to-night."

Roger knew from the old man's expression that something new had happened.

"What now, Cato?" he asked, quietly.

"Fust dar is two men bored fro' and fro'; den we hab dat French willyun shooting fro' de window; and now deah is a man outside in de snow wif a light."

The secret service man arose quickly to his feet.

"A light!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sah—a red light—and he is carryin' on mighty queer wif it."

"One moment," said the one-armed man, hastily.

He crossed to the door with a few rapid steps and threw it open; then placing his fingers to his lips he emitted a peculiar whistle. Instantly the signal was answered from without. A few moments later a man,

white with snow and with tiny icicles hanging from his hair and beard, appeared at the doorway.

"Ah, is it you, Barker?" said the one-armed man. "Come in."

The man entered, and closed the door; he stood beating the heavy snow from his shoulders and hat, and eyeing Roger and Cato sharply. Then he advanced to the fireplace and stretched his hands out to the blaze.

"A vessel has just entered the bay," he said briefly.

"A vessel!" Roger's expression was one of vital interest as he uttered the words. "What sort of a vessel?"

"A small sloop such as the farmers hereabouts use to take their crops to New York and other places."

"What is there so remarkable about that, that you should think it worth your while to come here and report it?"

"The people upon the sloop are British," said the man, stolidly. "They came close under the north shore to escape the wind, and I was enabled to make my way out to them on the ice."

"Are you sure they are British?"

"Positive. I was within ten yards of their stern at one time, and heard quite a conversation between two of those in charge. They are here upon some urgent business that must be transacted to-night."

Roger arose to his feet.

"I think," said he, "that I should be aboard my brig; perhaps the errand of the sloop in the bay at this time is to attempt her capture."

"You may be correct," said the secret service man. Then after a pause during which he watched Roger pull on his heavy pilot jacket, he added: "Have you any objection to our accompanying you?"

"None in the world," answered the young sailor. "Indeed," with a smile, "you may prove useful, as none of my lads are at hand."

Telling Cato that he would return as soon as possible, Roger stepped out into the darkness and storm with the two men at his heels. The old black servant called something to him in the nature of a warning; but it was lost in the heavy drive of the wind; then

the door closed upon them, and they fronted the stinging sleet with bent heads, making the best speed possible toward the bay shore.

As they were about passing White Towers, which stood shrouded in ghostly snow and looming oddly through the storm, Roger's keen eyes caught a movement among the high-heaped drifts.

"Sh-h-h," he breathed, warningly to his companions. Immediately they halted—then stood motionless, watching a dark, indistinct figure as it moved slowly along, now plainly seen against the white background. Then Roger crept forward softly, with the others following closely behind. At length the skulking figure ahead paused before the wrecked old mansion; and as Roger noiselessly advanced he was astonished to note that the attitude was one of sorrow; it was a tall, youthful figure; the head was bent, the hands were stuffed deep into the pockets of a rough seaman's coat.

Suddenly Roger stepped into a snow-filled hollow which caused him to lose his balance; the scrambling he made in the soft drift caused the stranger to whirl about and leap upon

him. Immediately the two secret service men sprang to the young sailor's aid, and with that the stranger whipped out a pistol and cried:

"Keep your distance, or it will be the worse for you."

At sound of the voice Roger bounded to his feet.

"Steve!" he almost shouted.

"Roger!" came the answering cry, and in another instant the two friends were gripping each other by the hand. When their surprise had worn off and their fragmentary greetings had been exhausted, Roger said:

"And, tell me, Steve, how did you get here, and at this time above all others?"

"I sailed north in a clipper ship which left Charleston some few weeks ago. The captain agreed to set me ashore here as he passed on his way to New York. But because of some strange sails he grew nervous and refused to keep his word; the best he would do was to sell me a boat, which I came ashore in."

"In all this storm?"

"It was a desperate chance," said Stephen

Randall, "but my business would not stand delay, so I took it."

There was a deep note in Stephen's voice that surprised Roger, as the strong grip of his hand had a few moments before. Apparently Stephen had developed a good deal during his hunt in the South. He had grown stronger, and less nervous and fearful than he had been when the young seaman had seen him last.

"What business have you here so urgent as all that?" asked Roger, while Stephen was shaking hands with Mason, whom he now recognized.

"To save the hidden cipher," returned Stephen, quietly.

"Ah!" and Roger peered into his friend's face through the gloom and the whirling snow. "You have some new information of importance, I see."

"I have. And the Marquis of Glastonbury figures in it, as he did before. Roger," Stephen spoke with sudden vehemence, "that man is a demon!"

"Not quite," returned the young master of the *Spitfire* coolly, "but almost."

"He must be altogether so, for he can somehow acquire information that would be impossible to any other man."

"The British system of spies is very complete," spoke the secret service man.

"It must be," answered Stephen, "for Mayhew's presence upon the *Dauntless* was known to few and ——"

"Mayhew!" cried Roger and the others in a breath.

"That's so," said Stephen, "I had forgotten that you did not know. After a hunt along the entire southern seaboard I received news only a few weeks ago that Lieutenant Mayhew was at Charleston for the purpose of establishing new batteries in some of the lower forts. I immediately started from Mobile, where I was when this news reached me. But when I arrived, Mayhew had just gone down the coast in the gunboat *Dauntless* to inspect a site for a new defense. I engaged a small vessel and made sail after him; next day I sighted the gunboat just as she was being attacked by a small British vessel, which, strange to relate, after taking the

Dauntless by boarding, almost immediately drew off, and sailed away.

"When I boarded the American vessel I found her single gun spiked and her officers in a state of amazement. This latter was occasioned by the fact that Lieutenant Mayhew had been taken out of the vessel, and no one else; I was as much puzzled as they until I heard that the British sloop was commanded by our old acquaintance the Marquis of Glastonbury. There could only be one explanation to his proceedings, and that was the cipher key. Then I overhauled the clipper as she sailed out of Charleston harbor, and finding that she was bound for New York, I boarded her."

"You suspected that the British vessel, with Mayhew a prisoner on board, would sail for this place?"

"I did."

"And you were correct," said Roger Dare; "for she now lies, unless I am greatly mistaken, in the bay."

"In the bay?"

"Yes; it's queer that you did not see her as you came in."

"I landed about two miles farther up the coast," said Stephen.

"That explains it then. But come, let us try to find out what they are about. We were upon our way to the bay shore when we sighted you making your way toward the house, here."

Stephen looked at the cheerless, snow covered walls that arose gaunt and inhospitable in the night; he shivered.

"There is not a great deal left of the old place, is there?" he said.

"No!" answered Roger; "between you all, the building has suffered."

Then all four made their slow way through the drifts in the direction of the bay; but they had not gone a dozen yards when they heard the murmur of voices, and discerned a number of men advancing directly toward them.

"It's Glastonbury and his men," said Roger as he caught the clank of arms and the harsh voiced commands of officers.

They crouched behind a huge drift and waited; in a few moments the party had come up and passed them on the way to White Towers. As they did so Roger heard the

smooth accents of the Marquis, as he said in a mocking manner,

"I felt quite confident that you would come to our way of thinking before we had done with you, my dear lieutenant ——"

Then the following words were lost in the storm.

"Remain here," said Roger, in a low voice to his companions, "if you hear me call or fire, advance, but not before."

He crept away through the snow after the party of British; they were inside the dismantled mansion when he reached there, and he stood without a gaping snow-filled window, listening and watching eagerly.

Glastonbury had ordered several ships' lanterns, which they carried, lighted; their pale flare lit up the scene but dimly. However, Roger could see all quite plainly. The seamen were a half dozen in number and were armed with pistol, cutlass, and musket; there was a midshipman in the party, an upright spruce looking chap, who had charge of the men.

In the centre of the room stood the Marquis, shaking the snow from a long boat cloak;

upon a broken chair sat a dark haired, fine looking young man of athletic build; but his face was pale and drawn; his attitude was that of one in agony.

"White Towers," said the Marquis, calmly, as he replaced the cloak about his shoulders, and looked down at the man in the chair, "is vastly changed since you served as secretary to my dear relative, Colonel Randall, is it not?"

"It is," answered the other, briefly.

"But for all that you will be able to find this little hiding place of which you spoke, will you not?"

"It is more than likely," answered the other. He spoke in a low voice and never raised his eyes from the floor.

"I am very sorry, indeed, to have inflicted any pain upon you," said the Marquis with smooth suavity. "Let me assure you that each stroke of the cat hurt me as much as it did you."

At this the young man raised his eyes for the first time, and Roger saw them flash with scorn.

"It would be as well for you not to play

the hypocrite with me," said he in a voice full of suppressed fury. "It will serve no purpose, and will only increase my contempt for you, were that possible."

The Marquis shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"My dear lieutenant ——" he began, but the other cut him short.

"You strung me up to a grating in the presence of your entire ship's company and lashed me with the cat as though I were a low ruffian of the forecastle; I will not forget this, sir, and if the time ever comes, believe me I shall do my best to make you regret your act."

"It is a foolish thing to cherish malice," sneered the other, in his coldest tones. "In doing what I did, I merely used the swiftest method of bringing you to your senses. You defied me at first; but three dozen of the cat caused you to change your mind."

The other winced at this and the young sailor at the window saw him set his teeth firmly and turn his eyes doggedly to the floor. The Marquis waited for him to answer, but as he did not do so the nobleman turned to the midshipman.

"Mr. Sears," said he calmly, "get your men to work."

The midshipman saluted.

"The bars, men," said he briskly. Then as several heavy iron bars were produced, he continued addressing the Marquis: "Under the hall stone, I think it was, sir."

"Quite right, Mr. Sears, under the hall stone. And it should require no more than a few moments to raise it."

The partition wall between the room and hall had been torn away; the men set to work to pry up a huge slab of white stone at the threshold of the main door. They dug the points of the heavy implements into the seams and soon had loosened the stone sufficiently to raise it. Roger watched them do this with his breath strangling in his throat, his heart thumping violently. Mayhew sat with bowed head, apparently overcome by the whole situation. As the stone was lifted by the brawny seamen and thrown aside, the midshipman flashed the rays of one of the ship's lanterns into the opening disclosed; then the Marquis stooped over with an exclamation of delight.

"At last!" he cried, and Roger saw him straighten up, a yellowed sheet of parchment crackling in his hand. "Now their coasts are at our mercy!"

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than Mayhew, with a wild cry sprung upon him and wrenched the paper from his hand. Then with a shout of defiance the young man leaped through one of the sashless windows and disappeared in the darkness before the astounded British could raise a hand or fire a shot.

CHAPTER XVIII

LOCKED IN THE ICE

For a few moments the usually ready Marquis of Glastonbury stood amazed. Then he cried out, with all the savagery of a disappointed animal:

"After him, lads! Ten guineas for the man who brings him down."

At once the seamen sprang away in pursuit, with the midshipman and the Marquis at their head.

Then Roger rushed back and informed his startled companions of what had happened, and they all at once took up the pursuit through the storm. But they had nothing to guide them save the sounds ahead, and as these grew fainter and fainter, finally ceasing altogether, they paused baffled.

"What now?" asked Stephen, after they had stood for a moment in the snow.

"Back to the bay shore," said Roger Dare

promptly. "Whether they catch him or not they will return to their vessel. The *Spitfire* will be awaiting them when they do."

"Good," said the secret service men in a breath.

They retraced their steps toward the little bay; and reaching it they signaled the brig, which at once sent a boat ashore to bring them aboard. For more than an hour they kept watch upon deck; at length they heard a pistol shot from the shore and then the rattle of blocks as a boat was lowered from the invisible sloop.

The wind had gone down by this time, and the snow had ceased. But it had grown intensely cold; and the grinding of the ice about the brig's hull was a steady and melancholy sound.

"Mr. Taylor," said Roger, after he had listened for sounds of the returning boat, and was at length rewarded, "ship the anchor at once, and make sail."

The men swayed and swung around the capstan; the anchor chain was bound in the ice and much difficulty was experienced in the work. But at last the task was done and

light sail was hoisted; but the *Spitfire* never budged.

The dawn was slowly rising and its faint light showed the dim outlines of the British sloop already under canvas and moving slowly toward open water. Roger saw this as he glanced over the starboard rail.

"We are wedged in the ice at the bow," said he. "Mr. Taylor, order a half dozen men over the side to cut her out."

This order was instantly carried out; two boats were lowered, and soon the steady strokes of the axes were heard as the seamen set desperately to work.

"She will escape us!" cried Stephen as he saw that it would require time to free the brig from her icy fetters. "We shall be too late!"

"Perhaps not," said Roger coolly, "see, she must pass within a pistol shot of us to avoid those floes; we'll try a gun upon her."

The axes bit into the ice about the bows; and the British sloop came on. At length Roger hailed her.

"Heave to," he shouted, after he had been answered.

The light was now fairly good, and he could see the sloop's crew crowding to the rail ; many pointing fingers showed that they perceived the *Spitfire's* predicament. The Marquis of Glastonbury was pacing her quarter deck ; he waved his hand to Roger in mocking salute.

" You will pardon me if I decline," said he, recognizing the young captain instantly, so close were they together. " And pray accept my sympathy for your ice-locked condition."

" My guns are not ice locked," cried Roger, through his trumpet. " Heave to, or I'll sink you ! "

But the Marquis only laughed and waved his hand once more.

" Give my compliments to my escaped prisoner," said he, and there was a trace of bitterness in his voice. " Say to him that I hope to meet with him again, foot to foot and sword to sword ; and I'll then engage to have his traitorous life."

As the sloop passed gallantly on Roger cried to his first officer, " You may fire, Mr. Taylor."

The long pivot gun spoke gruffly and the shot smashed some of the sloop's housing.

But this was the only gun that could be brought to bear and by the time it was loaded and sighted once more the British craft was bowling away with increasing speed.

"Careful, Mr. Taylor," said Roger. "Try for his rigging."

"Ay, ay, sir," came the response. Again the gun barked, and true to its mark sped the shot, splintering the sloop's topmast. But this was soon cleared away, and despite the excellent gunnery of Lieutenant Taylor she got clear of the bay without further damage.

"No use," said the young captain of the brig, as he gave the word to cease firing. "He's beyond our reach."

"But he's left Mayhew and the cipher behind," cried Stephen, exultantly.

"Perhaps," answered Roger as he peered over the rail at the seamen who were still cutting at the ice. "But don't be too sure of that. The Marquis of Glastonbury is a gentleman of infinite resource."

CHAPTER XIX

A DASH FOR FREEDOM

It took some hours to clear the brig, and then she was towed out into open water. When daylight was fully come, Roger, Stephen, the two secret service men and some members of the crew went ashore to look for traces of Lieutenant Mayhew; but they sought all day without success.

That night they spent at the cottage with old Cato. The faithful servant was delighted beyond measure to see his young master once more, and hovered about him constantly. The next day and the next was spent in searching for the missing man, but still there was no result.

"The Marquis may have had him in the sloop after all," said Stephen.

"I think not," said the one-armed man. "His tone was too bitter when he spoke of Mayhew. It is my opinion that we shall

come upon some trace of the officer before long."

The next day proved the truth of this; they came upon a small hut at Montauk Point, the inhabitant of which, a grizzled old fisherman, told them how he had found a young man exhausted in the snow, and had taken him in.

"It wasn't so much the cold that tuckered him out," said the old man; "it was the beating he had received. His back was laced into shreds."

Roger remembered the talk of Mayhew's being flogged on board the sloop to make him tell where the cipher key was hidden; and he knew at once that the old fisherman's guest was the man they sought.

"Where is he now?" inquired the lad eagerly.

The old man crossed his legs and clasped his hands about one knee.

"He's somewheres at sea," he replied. "Captain Heffron in the *Sarah May* was sailing for New Orleans, and took him along. You see the young feller was mighty sick; and as there is a doctor aboard the *Sarah May*, and

the sick man had money, why we kind of thought that it would be best for all hands if he went in her."

"What now?" asked Stephen, as they slowly made their way back toward Good Ground.

"The *Spitfire* sails for New Orleans at once," answered Roger decisively.

Before they reached the bay their plans were completed. The secret service men were to remain in the neighborhood of White Towers, as was Cato; Stephen was to accompany Roger in the brig in the run south.

The brave little vessel set sail at once; but misfortune seemed to single her out, for she had her foremast carried away in a gale, and she put into New London, having been blown in that direction by the storm. When all was ready for her to put to sea once more the news came that the harbor was blockaded by a British ship-of-the-line and two frigates.

This was disheartening news for the two boys; there were a few American privateers in the port, but none large enough to cope with the blockaders; so New London was, for the time at least, sealed. During the remainder

of the winter the brig lay at anchor; in the spring, unable to bear the suspense any longer, both Stephen and Roger made their way to Washington by stage, to inquire if the War Department had any information as to Lieutenant Mayhew.

"We know nothing," they were told, after they had related their story to the heads of the department. "If Lieutenant Mayhew were in possession of so important a document as the cipher key, he would be sure to place himself in communication with us."

"But," inquired Roger anxiously, "you do not think the British have the key, do you?"

"No," was the confident answer. "The way they are going about their work of attacking and blockading proves that."

It was March, 1814, before the two lads heard anything of the missing man. Then they received a message from the assistant secretary of war notifying them that word had reached Washington that Mayhew was reported to be very ill in the neighborhood of New Orleans. A British corvette had been captured by an American ship-of-war and

among her papers was a letter to Admiral Cochrane of the British squadron. The letter was signed by the Marquis of Glastonbury.

"That settles it," said Roger Dare, resolvedly, "blockade or no blockade, we must put to sea."

"We could never slip past those heavy ships of war," cried Stephen.

"We are going to try at all events," said Roger.

The crew of the *Spitfire* had all been discharged long before; so that evening Roger spoke to his first officer, Mr. Taylor, who was still in the brig, regarding the prospects of shipping a new crew.

"I suppose there are a great many seamen in the towns along the bay," said the young captain.

"Hundreds of them. The pick of them could be had by any enterprising captain who could get to sea. They are able seamen, and desperate fighters all; I'd like to sail with such a lot behind me."

"I hardly think," said the young commander, "that a crew could be shipped that would take the same chance taken by those

upon the *Yankee Tar*, which was sunk some few weeks ago."

"There you are mistaken," said the first mate. "You could get two ships' companies immediately if you desired them, and a round score would be from the old crew of the *Tar* herself. The sailormen are anxious for a cruise and prize money; they would face the entire English navy, and only ask half a chance."

"Send out word that the *Spitfire* is shipping a crew and that she'll sail in a fortnight," said Roger Dare, promptly.

"You don't mean it," cried the delighted mate.

"I was never more serious in my life. The brig shall be docked to-morrow, and we'll scrape her bottom, for she must be foul again. Then we'll get her trim and true aloft, and see what can be done afterward."

The town soon rang with the news, and seamen anxious for a cruise thronged the piers inquiring for the skipper of the *Spitfire*. In a very few days the crew, seventy-five in all, were selected, and a fine, bronzed, hardy lot of young tars they were, American to a

man, all burning to get a chance at the foe, and secure a generous share of the prize money that a lucky cruise would bring.

Some delays were encountered in making the *Spitfire* ready for sea, and it was well into April before she was warped out of the dock, looking as trim, taut and natty as fresh paint and expert riggers could make her. One after another the officers of the privateers in the port came aboard of her and advised Roger against his desperate venture.

"What can a hooker like this do against that floating battery of seventy-four guns?" demanded one weather beaten old salt, with indignation. "She'll blow you out of the water."

"She will if she catches me," answered Roger, with a light laugh.

The old captain seemed to regard the lad's daring in the light of presumption; what possessed a boy to venture where a seasoned sailor like himself dreaded to go; it was something to be discouraged.

"If the ship-of-the-line can't catch you, there are some others in the blockading squadron that can," said the veteran, wrink-

ling his brows in a displeased sort of way. "There is a corvette yonder that sails like a flash. It was she that drove the *Yankee Tar* on the rocks."

"How much of a fight did Captain Judson of the *Tar* make?" inquired Roger, innocently. He had carefully gone over this point with some of the men who had sailed in the burned schooner, and had discovered that at the first scattering broadside Captain Judson had lost his head and thought only of flight; a few well served guns would have, perhaps, saved his vessel.

"He knew better than to try to fight against such odds," snorted the old master, as he went over the side, into his jolly boat. "Judson was no fool."

"That means that I am," laughed Roger, to Taylor, as the jolly boat shoved off and bore its irate captain back to his ship.

"Those fellows are not of the fighting stripe," said the first mate. "They sail for booty alone, and some of them are no better than sea robbers. My idea of a privateer is one like Barney; he fought everything that came his way, and never stopped to ask

questions about his enemy's weight of metal."

"Good!" cried Roger, who was an ardent admirer of that great sailor, Joshua Barney, first a privateer and then commodore in the navy. "I agree with you there, Mr. Taylor. And on this cruise we will strive to be as like Barney as possible."

Upon the second night after the brig had nosed her way out into the harbor, dirty weather came on; the gale tore along the coast like a raving giant; the stars and moon were hidden; the seas beat upon the shore with relentless fury.

"This is the night for us," said Roger, as he watched, in early evening, the dashing rain and the wrack of clouds scudding across the sky. "Are all the men at hand, Mr. Taylor?"

"There are but a very few ashore," answered the first officer, "and we can get word to them to come aboard within an hour."

"Do so at once," directed the young captain.

Those on shore leave came off immediately, and amid the darkness and storm the *Spitfire* hove her anchor and made sail.

Ahead all was darkness, and the whirling storm; but the little brig, like an intelligent thing delighted to be free once more, went plunging along, tossing the seas from her sharp bows with a zest and dash that made Roger's heart beat high with satisfaction. There were no lights to be seen on board of her; the word had been passed for silence among the men fore and aft; her nine pounders were loaded and primed; both the primings and the smouldering matches were shielded by heavy tarpaulins from the rain and spray, and from sharp eyes in the blockading fleet.

Roger and Mr. Taylor stood forward striving to pierce the murk ahead.

"It's as black as the inside of your hat," said the first officer, in a low tone; "we could almost smash into them before we'd be aware of each other's presence."

"They don't seem to show any more light than we do," answered Roger, as he continued to strain his eyes ahead.

On went the *Spitfire* through the darkness; at length the fierce sweep of the wind told them that they were well into the sound; Roger was just about turning to Mr. Taylor

with a delighted expression of satisfaction at their good fortune, when a shout from starboard warned him that they were not yet out of danger.

"Ahoy!" cried a voice all but drowned in the slanting hiss of the gale. "What ship is that?"

No answer came from the fleeing *Spitfire* save the creaking of her blocks, the rattle of her spars, and the slatting of her sails as she hauled about, hung for a moment, and then went dashing away from danger.

No farther inquiry was made from the invisible blockader; a gun roared redly in the night followed by another and still another. The next moment, the piping of shrill calls was heard above the gale and the roll of alarm drums went through the squadron.

"We seem to be in the midst of them," said Roger, his quick ear noting that the sounds came from all sides. "Bid the men stand to their guns; we may be forced to fight our way through, for all."

Lights began to sparkle from the British ships in tiny red spots, as the battle lanterns were lighted. Dead ahead lay a vessel appar-

ently smaller than the others of the squadron, and from her low lying deck came the bustle of preparation.

"It's the corvette that we've heard of," said Taylor to Roger.

"The only vessel among them fast enough to catch us," returned Roger. "Bring us across her stern, Mr. Taylor, and we'll try to cripple her and put a stop to that."

The grizzled first officer sprang to the helm himself and the brig in a few moments crept upon her foe like a ghost. In quick succession three broadsides were poured into the helpless corvette, and her rigging and spars hung, a mass of wreckage, from her masts.

Then the *Spitfire* drew off, and with a spiteful last shot of her long bow gun, went slipping away into the storm, with the huge British ships-of-the-line crowding on sail after her.

CHAPTER XX

ROGER MEETS WITH JEAN LAFITTE

THE daring little brig soon showed the ponderous British battle ships that there was small chance of their overhauling her; she scudded away under as much sail as Roger dared to spread and soon was lost to them in the darkness.

The gale continued to blow for some days, and the *Spitfire* was driven south at a great rate, and when it was over they found themselves in the neighborhood of Bermuda. Here the *Spitfire* took a merchantman with a rich cargo; on board was an American seaman who had escaped impressment in a British war-ship; and he told Roger of a powerful fleet and army being collected at Bermuda for a descent upon New Orleans, then the great emporium of the western states.

"The man says that Admiral Cochrane is fitting out another fleet at Pensacola," said

Stephen, when they were well under way, a favoring breeze bearing them swiftly westward toward the gulf.

"But Pensacola is Spanish territory!" exclaimed the young captain.

"The British care little for that," said Stephen with a shrug; "and then these Spanish governors are easily bought."

But the brig was not to reach her journey's end so soon as Roger Dare hoped. Bad weather came on once more, and hostile vessels crossed his way; and he was forced to run as far south as the coast of Brazil to escape them; when, at last, the brig dashed the gulf seas from her prow, it was late in August.

Proceeding, with light winds, toward the mouth of the Mississippi, Roger and Stephen felt high-hearted once more; but soon the lookout sighted two sails that appeared to be ships of war. The brig ran in shore and hugged the coast, dodging alertly among the bays and islands that abound in that latitude. The strange ships came on to examine her. The *Spitfire* drew much less water and was enabled to avoid them by running into Barataria Bay and seeking the protection of the

shoal water about a small island. The other craft, however, hovered about as though in doubt as to the best thing to do.

"They will end in sending boats off to attack us," said Stephen as he watched the strangers through his glass.

"We had better prepare for them, then," suggested Roger.

In a little while the *Spitfire's* decks were silently cleared, and her guns loaded with grape. Small arms were distributed among the crew. The little vessel lay at anchor all the afternoon, but there was no sign of the war-ships attacking her. The night drew on and passed; when morning bathed the warm waters of the bay with gold nothing was to be seen of the British ships.

"They have thought better of it," said Roger, as he came on deck and heard the news. "Well, that is all the better for us; there was nothing but hard knocks to be had by engaging them."

The little island lay off their port side, green, redolent of flowers and glowing with ripened fruit. It had been months since the

two lads had been ashore, and a sudden yearning came over them to put off to this beautiful spot and walk about in the shade of its groves, pluck the ripe fruit and drink of the brooks which they knew would be there.

"You had better take a few men," said the first officer, when Roger announced their intentions. "And take your cutlasses and pistols. I've heard strange tales of these waters; they are none too safe, by all accounts."

A boat was lowered and Roger, Stephen and four men, including Starbuck and Davis, pulled off to the island.

"A beautiful place, indeed," said Roger, as his feet pressed the fine white sand of the beach, and his eyes took in the graceful shapes of the tall, waving palms.

Starbuck sniffed the warm air and said, as he saluted,

"Begging your pardon, sir, but there is like to be fever in these islands; they are most all swamp, and the sun rots everything."

"There is little romance in you old sea-dogs," laughed Roger.

They pushed ahead slowly through the

groves and interlacing growth ; the island was a very small one, and they had about reached its centre when Roger halted suddenly and raised his hand for silence.

" What is it ? " asked Stephen.

The soft wind was rustling the tufted tops of the palms and the brilliantly colored birds were chattering shrilly ; but above this came the unmistakable sound of human voices. They were not near enough to catch the words ; but the voices were raised to a sharp pitch of anger ; one seemed to be threatening, the other defying.

" There is trouble of some sort ahead," said the young captain of the brig as he hitched the hilt of his cutlass nearer to his hand. " Follow me, and step as softly as possible."

He and Stephen went forward slowly and carefully, the four seamen at their heels. The voices became more distinct ; they could now distinguish words, a strange mixture of Spanish, French and English. At length they reached the edge of the chaparral through which they were passing ; in a small clearing, in the centre of which was a rough hut of logs, were grouped a dozen or more men. They

were a dark, wild looking lot, with scowling, savage faces, and they were armed to the teeth.

Some of them were negroes, others were mulattos, others again showed evidence of a mongrel Indian descent; a few disreputable Spaniards and creoles were also among them.

Upon the ground near the door of the hut lay a man; he was apparently fast in the clutches of swamp fever, or some such complaint, for his face was white, his eyes had an unnatural brilliancy and the stare of delirium; his lips were muttering and his wasted hands were raised as though to ward off danger.

"Mayhew," breathed Roger in Stephen's ear. "And we seem to be just in time."

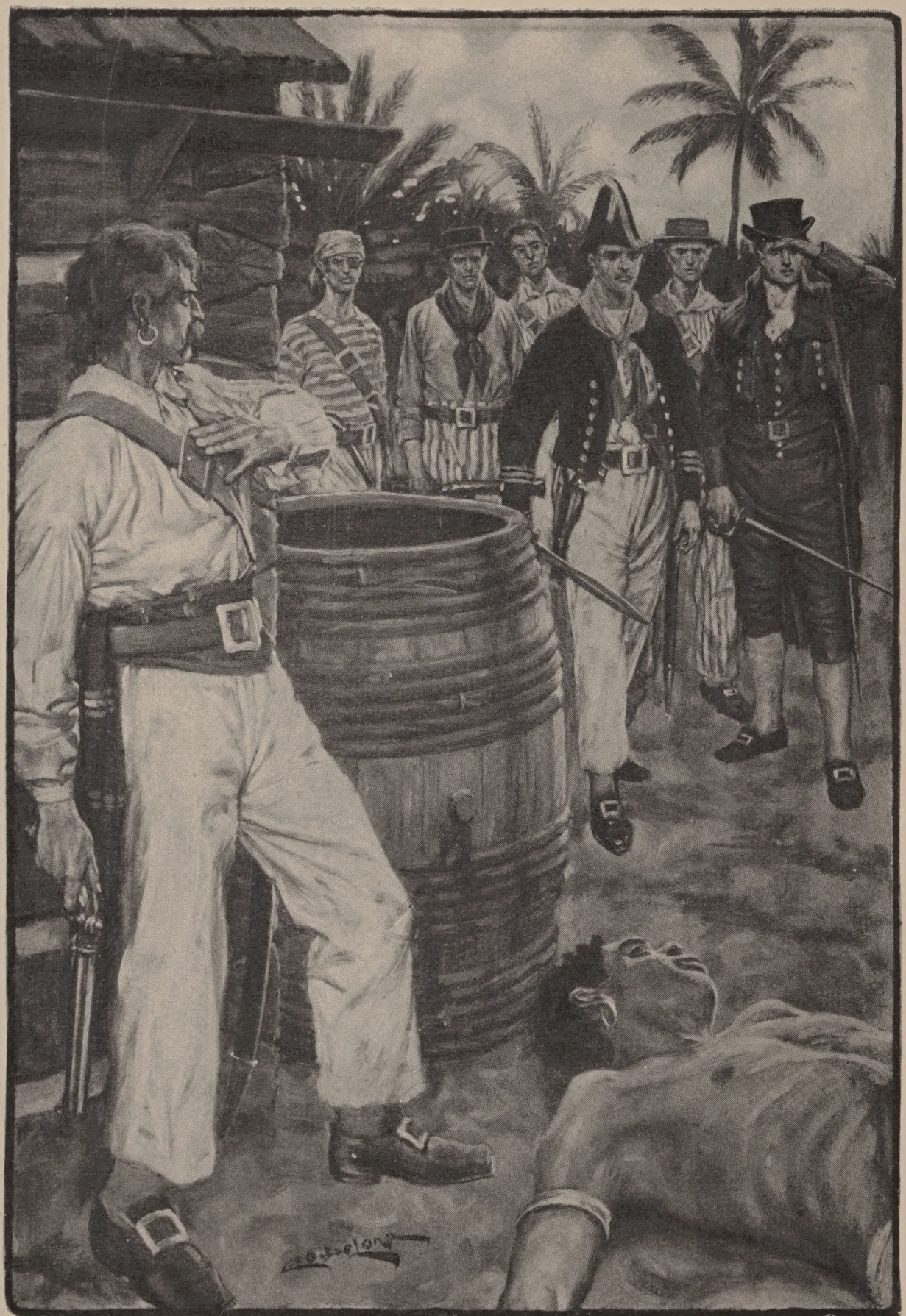
A slight dark man with the flashing eyes and small hands and feet of the creole, stood over Mayhew, facing the others, a cocked pistol in his hand. Before him was a huge negro, looking for all the world like a savage chieftain; he flourished a heavy boarding axe about his head.

"You mongrel swine," the man with the pistol was saying, his voice high pitched, and quivering with anger. "You have sold him

to the British. I know you, Baptiste Morode," addressing the black, "and I know all your cronies in the band, and what you are likely to do. He is my guest; and my life stands between him and you."

He quivered with rage as he almost shrieked these words; the huge negro made no answer, but leaped forward, swinging the boarding axe for a fatal blow. But the muzzle of the white man's pistol stared him in the face for one brief instant, then exploded; and the great black body paused, swaying weakly; then the axe fell from his hands, the arms were wide flung and Baptiste Morode crashed to the earth.

The remainder of the party without an instant's hesitation threw themselves upon the man who thus dared them to their worst; he flashed out the sword that hung at his side and engaged them desperately, slashing and cutting with the fury of a man driven to bay. Like snarling wolves the others pressed upon him. Just when he must have thought that the next blow would be his last, Roger Dare, Stephen and the four hardy tars, leaped from the bush with drawn blades and ready pistols;



THEY CAME FORWARD WITH DRAWN BLADES

and in another instant the desperadoes were flying helter-skelter for their lives.

The small dark man stood leaning against the wall of the hut breathing heavily; his great dark eyes were fixed upon his rescuers steadfastly; one of his slim hands was waving his thanks.

"A narrow escape, sir," said Roger Dare.

Without a word the stranger advanced, took his hand and pressed it hard; he was still too breathless to speak, but his manner conveyed his feelings perfectly. The athletic young sailor towered above him head and shoulders; but there was an air of command about the stranger that gave dignity to his short stature. At last he was able to speak.

"Sir," said he, as he bowed to Roger and his men, "I am grateful; I thank you. You have saved my life. Another moment and those swine would have had me under foot and let the life out of me with their blades. I will remember; no matter what else may be said against him, it will never be said that Jean Lafitte proved ungrateful."

"Jean Lafitte!" echoed Roger in astonishment.

The stranger laughed lightly.

"Does it surprise you?" asked he. "Yes; I am Lafitte, leader of the privateers of Barataria."

CHAPTER XXI

THE NOBLE MARQUIS ONCE MORE

STEPHEN and the seamen were attending to Mayhew; seeing this Roger gave all his attention to Lafitte.

For years this enterprising buccaneer had made his rendezvous at Barataria and levied toll upon passing ships. His armed vessels were many; whole colonies of men were under his command; the administration of the law was lax, as the United States had but newly pushed its borders to the open gulf, and so this little dark man was practically the ruler of the neighboring seas.

Roger Dare had frequently heard of him; but he had always fancied Lafitte to be a great, shaggy brute who condemned men to death upon the slightest pretext, attacked helpless merchantmen with carronade, musket and pike, and otherwise conducted himself after the fashion of the pirate of romance. That this

slim, dark little man in spotless white trousers and jacket and with the suave manners of the typical creole gentleman should be Lafitte seemed impossible. The subject of these thoughts watched the young sailor intently, seemed to read his thoughts and laughed once more.

"Oh, you are surprised, like many more," said he, lightly. "I have been much discussed and, I fear, much slandered." He paused a moment, his keen eyes running over Roger and the tars at his side. "You are Englishmen, I suppose," he continued.

"No; Americans," answered Roger. "We are from the brig *Spitfire*, anchored off this island."

"Americans! Ah, I like the Americans. They are a progressive race. They are not like the slow-blooded Spaniards and the creoles, who think it a disgrace to work. Now that Louisiana belongs to the Americans they will make something of it—something to be proud of."

"If given time, yes," returned Roger.

"And so the brig is American?" went on Lafitte. "I saw her come up yesterday. When the others moved around to the far side

of the island during the night I thought it a little strange."

"The others!" said Roger in surprise.

"Of course. The British ships."

"I thought they had gone!" exclaimed the young American.

"No," said Lafitte; "they are at anchor in the bay. Indeed I have learned that some of them are to come off, having purchased," bitterly, "my guest here from this traitor at my feet."

"Purchased!" echoed Roger.

"Yes. These English are ever very ready with their gold. This young American officer," and he nodded toward Mayhew, "seems to have some information which they desire. To approach a villain like Baptiste Morode was easy enough; but how they discovered that Mr. Mayhew was my guest is more than I can understand."

Mayhew was now borne into the hut and placed upon a bed.

"He has lain here for some weeks burning up with fever," continued Lafitte. "They were upon the point of carrying him to the landing place of the British when I arrived."

He raised Mayhew's head and gave him a cooling drink. Then he turned to the two young Americans.

"But it is not only upon the matter of Mr. Mayhew that the English officers land upon this island to-day. They come to see me, as well."

Roger gazed into the dark face of the pirate, for such he was beyond question, and a thrill ran through his blood at what he saw there.

"The British are sending envoys to you," said he, quietly, keeping his true feelings hidden beneath the jest.

Lafitte laughed.

"Envoys! Ah, well perhaps that is near the truth, after all. In times like these," proudly, "a man like Jean Lafitte is very useful."

"They are soliciting all the aid they can, I suppose?" said Roger, his thumbs in his belt, his feet very wide apart, his manner cool and inquiring.

"They are," answered Lafitte. "There is a fleet of small vessels at Pensacola which the British seem to have seized in spite of Spanish protests. During the summer I heard of the

brig *Orpheus* landing a number of officers at Appalachicola Bay; they made arrangements with the Creeks, and the savages are to aid them in their designs upon Louisiana."

"The same methods that they are using in the north!" cried Roger indignantly.

"But here they are enlisting the Indians," smiled Lafitte; "they have attired them in British uniform and drill them daily. And the Indians are not the only ones whom they have approached. The slaves also received some of their attention."

"The slaves!"

"Yes. They have been encouraged to rebel, kill their masters and take possession of the plantations. Ah, my dear sir, the British stop at nothing. Success is their object, and win it they will, no matter how."

"And now they are coming here to secure your help." Roger regarded Lafitte for a moment, steadily, then continued: "And, if I may ask it, what will be your answer?"

A brisk, bustling little man, old, but with the springy step of youth, came hurrying into the hut at this moment.

"Captain Lockyer and another gentleman

are coming, sir," said he. Then with a stare of astonishment at Roger and his men he continued: "But who are these?"

"They are friends of mine," smiled Lafitte. "They came at a moment when they were badly needed. Look here," and he pointed through the doorway to the body of the giant negro which lay only a few yards away.

The brisk little man stared more than ever.

"Baptiste Morode!" he cried. "And dead."

"Yes," answered Lafitte. "It was a thing to be expected, was it not?"

"I warned you long ago against him, my captain," said the little man. "He was a traitorous hound and stirred discontent at Barataria. But why did you shoot him?"

"He and his cronies were about to deliver Mr. Mayhew to the British."

"I warned you not to permit them on the island," cried the other, with a pale face.

Lafitte laughed once more and turned to Roger.

"My man of business, Mr. Cajours," said he, by way of introduction. "It is he who

disposes of those vessels and cargoes which it is my good fortune to take, and," smilingly, "he also acts as my adviser in many things."

"And always to your good!" cried Cajours. "You are reckless, Jean; you take unnecessary risks. It is a wonder to me that Baptiste and the rest of those fellows had not made away with you long ago."

"Ah, well, Cajours, I take your advice, do I not—that is when it is convenient. So, you have nothing to complain of."

"You take my advice in small things, but not in the greater ones. Here are these English," and the little man grimaced sourly, "come to buy you, and you treat with them just as if they had any honor and thought to deal fairly." He cast a rapid glance at Roger and his boat's crew. "I don't know," he continued, "what nation these gentlemen and their followers are of, but I will say it boldly that I detest the British. They have treated me unfairly; they used me as a dog; they seized my plantation in Bermuda without cause; they cast me out of the island and made a beggar of me." He glared at the

lads and shook his fist in the air. "Oh, how I detest the English!"

"I don't wonder at it," smiled Roger, while Starbuck and the other seamen grinned.

"You are wasting your indignation," said Lafitte. "These are Americans."

Cajours at this darted forward and seized Roger's hand.

"Americans! Welcome! Welcome!" cried he, delightedly. "And come from General Jackson, I'll be bound."

"General Jackson!" said Roger, in surprise. "No; you are mistaken there."

Cajours seemed disappointed. It was Lafitte who spoke next.

"Cajours has been expecting the new hero of the whites of this region to send to us for aid against his foes. You know of Jackson, of course?"

"I know that he has been engaged in putting down the Creeks and other hostile tribes," said Roger, "but that is all."

"A fine soldier," said Lafitte, admiringly. "One who knows the profession of arms thoroughly; and when he acts he acts like lightning, and with about the same effect.

There is never any discussion about his victories. That he *is* the victor is always very evident."

"The English," said Cajours, "are going to make an attempt upon Fort Bowyer, at the mouth of Mobile Bay, and then upon New Orleans. Jackson must need help; why does he not come to us as the British do? He makes a mistake in neglecting this—a very great mistake."

At this moment there came a crashing of feet among the dry underbrush without, and a tall, soldierly looking man in the scarlet coat of a captain of British infantry came into view; and immediately behind him walked another man of elegant and aristocratic bearing, looking strangely out of place upon that wild island, so carefully was he dressed, so mincing was his step as he avoided soiling his highly polished boots in the pools and damp grass. Lafitte had gone outside at the first hint of their approach and, upon his request that they do so, Roger and Stephen followed him. Roger, when he got a good view of the last of the newcomers, uttered an exclamation of astonishment, which Stephen echoed.

Immediately the man raised a gold rimmed glass and fixed the youths with a cold stare that instantly gave way to a glare of amazement and hate.

"Again," he cried out.

"Once again," smiled Roger, coolly. "When I learned of the attempt to buy this fellow," and the young sailor pointed to the body of Baptiste Morode, "I might have known very well that the Marquis of Glastonbury had a hand in it."

"Your tongue has lost none of its sharpness," said the Marquis, whose even manner had now returned. Then he fixed his glass upon Stephen; the now strapping proportions and resolute expression of the lad seemed to surprise him.

"You have improved," said he, coldly.

"It has been a sort of training for me, this last year or so," said Stephen, coolly. "Indeed," significantly, "I hardly think you will find me the same person at all."

Roger noticed the dark eyes of Lafitte regarding them with some surprise, but before he had a chance to make any explanation,

the soldier-like man who bore the Marquis company now stepped forward.

"This is Captain Jean Lafitte, I believe," began he.

The pirate bowed in silence.

"I am Captain Lockyer, in the service of his Britannic majesty, and I bear letters for you from the commander of the English forces in this region."

He extended a packet of letters as he spoke, and Lafitte took and ran rapidly through them.

"Captain Nicholls is very considerate, and I thank him," said he at last.

Lockyer was apparently a man who disliked ceremony of any sort.

"He makes a definite proposition," said he, in a very businesslike way; "what is your answer to it?"

"I shall require time to consider it," returned Lafitte.

"No reflection is necessary in a matter of this sort, and under these circumstances," said Captain Lockyer. "You are a Frenchman; and France is friendly to England at this

time, as all her sons should be. Another thing; you should be glad of a chance to strike a blow against the United States government; it has proscribed you, and at this moment your brother is loaded with irons in the prison at New Orleans."

A shadow came over the face of Lafitte; the Marquis of Glastonbury saw it, and put in:

"Permit me to add my poor words to those of our excellent friend, Lockyer. What he says is true in every respect. A gentleman like you must choose carefully, and choosing carefully you must necessarily choose our cause."

Lafitte regarded the speaker gravely, then he nodded his head briefly in a way that might mean almost anything and said:

"Go on."

"We desire all the armed vessels at Barataria at this time," went on the Marquis as he twirled his gold mounted glass delicately, and smiled his assurance; "also all the crews of them and any other men that you may have under your command."

"You are asking a great deal," said Lafitte. "What say you, Cajours?"

"I never heard the like of it, captain," sputtered the little man who had been listening with increasing anger.

"If we are asking much," said Captain Lockyer, "we are also prepared to offer a great deal."

"Lend us your aid and the aid of your vessels and crews," added Glastonbury, "and we'll make you a captain in the British navy and deliver to you the sum of thirty thousand dollars at Pensocola or New Orleans, whichever you prefer."

Lafitte pondered; and it was then that Roger Dare spoke for the first time.

"How does Captain Lafitte know that your promises will be kept?" asked he, coolly.

Lafitte flashed him a quick smile of approval. The Marquis of Glastonbury turned upon the lad with haughty disdain.

"The gentleman," said he, coldly, "has the sacred word of a British officer."

Roger and Stephen laughed at this, as did Cajours and the Yankee seamen; the two British emissaries flushed hotly.

"In this western world the word of a British officer is not worth a great deal," said

Roger Dare. "It has been given too frequently and broken."

The Marquis of Glastonbury advanced with slow steps until he was at Roger's side; then he gazed into the lad's face with the cold, deadly expression seen in the eyes of a snake.

"It seems to me," said he, in a quiet voice that contained more menace than a higher pitched tone could possibly have done, "that you are interesting yourself greatly in something that does not concern you."

"What is going forward here," said Roger as he stared boldly into the face of the man, "concerns me as much as any one present. The safety of my country is, perhaps, at stake, and if there is anything that I can do to persuade Captain Lafitte to refuse your proposition, you may depend upon my doing it."

"You have ever taken that high tone since that morning at White Towers. For a raw boy you presume too much, it seems to me. Had it not been for the inopportune arrival of those yokels that night when I crossed swords with you in the library, I would have given you a lesson."

"It is never too late to learn," suggested

Roger, to the great delight of Starbuck and the other seamen.

The words had no sooner passed his lips than the white, but powerful hands of the Marquis shot forward and clinched about his throat. The nobleman had a frame like iron, in spite of his affectations ; but Roger tore his grip loose with ease and stood braced for a struggle. However, at this point Lafitte interfered.

" Hold your hands," said he, smilingly, as he came between them. " In a very short time you may try to choke the breath out of each other in the cause of your respective countries. But I cannot permit it here where I command."

The Marquis at a whispered word from Lockyer drew back ; then, after a little pause the latter said to Lafitte,

" When will your decision in this matter reach us ? "

" If I should make up my mind to look favorably upon your proposition," said the pirate, " I will send a man aboard of you within the week."

Both Englishmen saw that this was the

best that could be done; and after a very few more words, took their leave of Lafitte, the Marquis favoring Roger with a look of deadly enmity as he went.

"The gentleman regards you with but little favor," said the pirate, when their footsteps had died away.

"I have reason to think that he hates me," answered Roger Dare.

For another space there was silence. Then Lafitte took Cajours aside and they conferred earnestly together. At length Lafitte turned to Roger.

"When do you sail?" asked he.

"As soon as I return to the brig."

"Would it be asking too much if I requested you to carry a letter?"

"To whom?"

"To General Jackson at Mobile."

Roger gained his side at a bound and grasped his arm eagerly.

"You mean ——"

"I mean," interrupted Lafitte, "that through you I am going to offer my service to the American side in the coming battle."

CHAPTER XXII

STIRRING TIMES AT NEW ORLEANS

When the *Spitfire* sailed late next day she carried Cajours and Mayhew. The latter was still too ill to help himself and had to be carried on board; and the fever still kept his brain clouded with the fantastic imagery of delirium. Lafitte was afraid that another attempt might be made to sell him to the British by the more ruffianly among his followers; another thing: some distance up the Mississippi was an old negress famed as an herb doctor; she had performed some remarkable cures, and Lafitte was anxious to have her try her skill upon Mayhew.

Roger was curious to know what bond there was between Lafitte and Mayhew; and on the way up the Mississippi Cajours told him.

"About two years ago Lieutenant Mayhew saved the life of Lafitte when he was threatened by the cut-throat Spaniards. But Lafitte had an opportunity to pay the debt when

the young man was marooned by an American captain upon the island which we just left—marooned, mind you, and he so ill from exposure to cold somewhere up in the north, and from the effects of an inhuman flogging by the English, as to be almost at death's door. But Lafitte found him and we've nursed him ever since. His vitality was so low that it seemed that he'd never recover; from one complaint he slipped into another; this last one—the swamp fever—seems the most stubborn of all."

The agent of Lafitte and the sick lieutenant were landed and conveyed to the hut of the old negress. She had once been the slave of Lafitte but he had given her her freedom; and she was ready to do him any service in her power.

After this had been safely performed the brig ascended the river to New Orleans; then the two lads engaged horses and set out for Mobile, where they learned Jackson was at that time. Reaching the latter city they waited upon the commander at once.

General Andrew Jackson was unquestionably the greatest American soldier of his time;

and he looked the grim iron-hearted warrior to perfection. Roger had always heard him described as gaunt; but now he found him, through the ravages of a disease contracted in the swamps of Alabama, thin to the point of emaciation; the haggard lines about his mouth and eyes were deep and his expression was that of a man who suffered continually.

Notwithstanding all this, the rugged force of the leader was plain to be seen; sickness had in no wise diminished the invincible determination that ever characterized him; his eyes were as keen as ever, and his perception as clear. Most men enduring the agonies which Jackson must have suffered at this period would have taken to their beds; but not so this grim warrior. Like a fierce old lion he awaited the onset; his country was invaded by her mortal foes, and while he could draw a breath or strike a blow there he would be to face them.

The commander heard the lads' story, and then read the letter of Lafitte with satisfaction.

"I accept the offer of Captain Lafitte," said

General Jackson. "And you may bear my acceptance to him at once." He dashed off a few lines of writing in his heavy, sprawling hand; then as he was about to hand it to Roger he paused and glanced at them both, keenly.

"What position do you hold among the men of Barataria?" he asked.

Roger smiled at the bluntness of the question.

"We do not belong to Lafitte's band," he answered. "I am captain of the *letter-of-marque*, *Spitfire*, at anchor in the Mississippi, and this is my friend Mr. Randall. We chanced to meet with Lafitte and had the good fortune to do him a service. He entrusted the letter to us, knowing that we would be sure to bring it to you."

"I beg pardon of both of you," said the American commander. "While Lafitte is a good seaman and a fine fighter, he is still a pirate, and I suppose my coupling you with him is not exactly flattering."

Returning to New Orleans, the brig dropped down the river to carry Jackson's answer to Lafitte. On the way they stopped and visited

the hut of the old black herb doctress. Both lads were burning for a chance to question Mayhew as to his disposition of the document which he had snatched from the Marquis of Glastonbury that night more than a year ago. But the young man was still tossing restlessly about; his lips still babbled unmeaning things. The old negress shook her head when they asked about him.

"Dis young man's pow'ful bad, mars'," she answered. "He done been sick so long dat he only got jest a lil' bit of strenf left. He's outen he head mos' all de time."

"Will he get well, do you think?" asked Stephen.

"Mighty hard to say, sah, 'deed it is. Yo' can't tell 'bout dese fevers, nohow."

After this the days sped swiftly by. And each was marked by some new aggression upon the part of the British. Disappointed in their negotiations with Lafitte, the enemy turned their attention to the disaffected Creeks, drilled them, provided them with arms and clothing and other needful things.

Then came the attack upon Fort Bowyer and its gallant defense by Major Lawrence.

Worn out by the treacherous conduct of the Spaniards in harboring and helping the British, General Jackson advanced upon Pensacola with his army and reduced it; then he marched for New Orleans and prepared for the attack which he knew was coming.

It was the 22d of December, however, before the British effected a landing; on the afternoon the *Spitfire* swept up the river to carry the news to Jackson. As the brig passed the cabin of the old negress where he had last seen Mayhew, Roger longed to put off in a boat and speak to him. But the news he carried would not permit delay.

"He must be almost well by this time," said he to Stephen.

"It's been all of two months since we had word of him," returned the other lad; "and Lafitte's agent said he was doing well then."

The little brig had been anchored at Barataria all this time, for British ships had swarmed in those waters and she had been unable to sail. At last making a dash they had discovered the British landing.

However, she was too late with the news of the invasion; a young soldier, Major Villere,

galloped up to Jackson's headquarters before they could land.

"The enemy are upon us," he cried, as mud-splashed and reeling he burst into the commander's presence. "They landed at Bayou Bienvenu and advanced upon my father's plantation, capturing the militia encamped there."

Jackson was upon his feet in an instant; his fist struck the table a terrific blow, and his stern eyes flashed.

"They shall not sleep upon our soil!" he cried. Then turning to his aides, he continued: "Gentlemen, to work! We march at once to meet them."

When Roger and Stephen came ashore, the city was aflame with excitement, and the little army of militia was on the march down the river road toward the Villere plantation. The lads watched until they saw the gaunt figure of the commander ride by among his aides; then they followed.

Stephen noticed Roger's anxious bearing as they trudged along in the flare of the torches carried by a company of creole riflemen.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"If we had only stopped and taken Mayhew aboard as we came up the river," answered Roger. "Should the English advance he will surely be taken."

"He may not be there. Remember it is a long time since we heard any news of him. He may have recovered; he may even now be in this army."

There was a long silence between them. The shadowy army of ill-disciplined troops marched steadily along the torch-lit road; the grind of the artillery wheels could be heard from somewhere in the front; a company of colored freedmen was chanting a crooning song as they stumbled along in the semi-darkness. At length Roger spoke.

"I'm going to find if Mayhew is still at the hut."

"How?"

"By going down there."

Before Stephen had a chance to reply, there came a scattering rifle fire from the front, then the sudden shock and blaze of a volley.

The advance guards of both armies had met.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE EIGHTH OF JANUARY

During the entire time that Jackson's army lay behind the Rodriguez canal, throwing up earthworks, Roger Dare and Stephen Randall fretted and fumed with impatience. Roger up to this time had been unable to keep his resolve to go out to the hut which lay between the lines of the two armies.

"I can't stand this much longer," said the young sailor to his friend. "Here we have been lying idle for two weeks. Mayhew is not in the force under Jackson, we have made sure of that, and if the British have not already captured him he may be at the hut."

The next afternoon, unable to wait longer, they went to the Commander, told him their story, and asked permission to advance beyond the lines after dark and make an attempt to reach the habitation of the old herb doctress. Jackson shook his head doubtfully.

"There is very little chance of such a

venture succeeding," said he. "But you may try it if you will. However, you take your lives in your hands; the pickets of the enemy are well advanced and very alert."

But the two lads only desired the permission; they were willing to risk the danger; they considered the possible recovery of the cipher code worth the braving of a thousand such perils.

It was the night of the seventh of January, and fast approaching midnight, when the two lads crept beyond the farthest American outpost and cautiously advanced along the plain. The twinkling of the British camp-fires could be seen straight ahead; but they paid no attention to these, all their minds being centred in avoiding any possible British outpost.

The hut of the free woman was upon the edge of a swamp and with a small bayou behind it. They reached it without experiencing any difficulty or sighting any of the British pickets. There was a dim light burning in the living-room, and peering through a small window they saw the old colored woman crouched before an open fire; a large

iron pot was swinging above the blue cypress flame and the ancient crone stirred its contents with a huge spoon, her lips muttering some voodoo formula all the while.

Seeing that she was alone, Roger tapped softly upon the window; the old woman arose to her feet and called out without sign of fear, "Come in!"

The two lads went around to the door and entered. As they swung the door back into place the old herb woman said complainingly:

"So yo's gwine to start coming heah in de night, too, am yo'? Well, I'll jest let yo' know dat dar ain't no mo' sick young 'Mericans fo' yo' to cotch."

They halted as though they had been shot.

"He's been taken, then!" cried Roger.

The old woman gazed keenly at them through her large, horn rimmed glasses; apparently the examination was not satisfactory; she took a blazing brand from the fire and held it above her head so that its flare would fall full upon them.

"I declah!" she cried, almost instantly; "yo' is not de British sogers, 'tall."

"Don't you recognize me, aunty?" asked Roger.

"'Deed I does, sah; yo' is de young sailor gemman dat is po' Mars' Mayhew's friend. But yo's come too late fo' to see him, sah, if dat's what yo' want, 'case he's been took by de British, and now he's over dar in de old yellow mansion 'mong de trees near de river."

Then in answer to their questions the old woman told them her story. Mayhew, after a lingering illness, at last began to rally, thanks to his fine constitution and her care. But just when he had recovered sufficiently to begin to think about making his way to the American lines, a party of British surrounded the place and took him prisoner.

"Some of dem British officers done make dey headquarters at de old yellow mansion," concluded the free woman. "And dey is contrivin' some kind ob goings on wif dat po' young man, I know."

Roger had noticed the old house, of which the woman spoke, upon his former visit; it had once been the home of a sugar planter, but the encroachments of the river had made it no longer desirable.

Thanking the old woman warmly they left the hut, and began making their way toward a point farther down and nearer the river. It was then about midnight; they were surprised to note that the British camp-fires had disappeared almost entirely; those few that still remained, gleamed fitfully; dark masses seemed to be constantly passing before them. They could not understand this at first; at length Roger sensed its meaning, and gripped Stephen hard.

"The enemy are preparing for an advance," breathed he, in his friend's ear.

"You are right," returned Stephen, as he watched the flitting figures for a moment, his head lifted above the tall grass of the plain. "And from their hurry they will attack before daylight."

"We must make haste," said Roger. "If they once get between us and Jackson's lines we are lost."

As rapidly as secrecy would permit they crept through the grass and bush. At length they sighted the yellow house; making their way through the thick clump of stunted trees that surrounded it, they saw a rosy gleam of

light streaming from the lower windows out upon a long neglected garden.

A murmur of voices and the sound of laughter came from the far end as though a number of men were gathered there ; from the constant stamp of hoofs they knew that some horses were tied in an open shed a few yards away.

"Softly now," said Roger, "there may be some one there with the horses."

In a few moments they were beneath the walls ; in still a few more they were crouching beneath a low, wide window. The night was a mild one even for that soft southern climate ; the window stood wide and the sound of a voice came out to them as they eagerly listened, flattening themselves against the wall.

The voice was a strange one to them ; they could not understand what was being said ; finally they caught the sound of a closing door, then all was quiet, save for now and then a burst of laughter from the far end of the mansion. Encouraged by the continued silence, the two lads raised up and peered into the room. A young man was seated with bowed head and clasped hands by an empty

fireplace; a burning oil lamp stood upon a table near at hand.

"Mayhew!" whispered Stephen.

"And alone," answered Roger, in the same hushed voice. Then: "Hist!"

The sibilant, sharp pitched sound reached the ears of the young man at the table; he raised his startled eyes and gazed toward the window; from the outer darkness the two intent young faces peered in at him.

"Quick," breathed Stephen. "This way, lieutenant."

"Who is there?" asked the young man, still remaining in his chair.

"Stephen Randall."

"Ah!" An exultant light leaped into the young officer's eyes, but almost immediately died away. "I am manacled, and chained to the grate."

There was a moment's deathly silence. Then Roger spoke.

"Are you entirely alone?"

"For the present—yes."

"But there is danger of some one coming in on you?"

"At any moment."

There was another silence; then Stephen said:

"I'm coming in to you."

"And I," said Roger.

With their pistols ready in their hands they softly clambered through the window and stood in the room. They approached him swiftly.

"Let me see the irons," said Roger.

The young soldier silently held up his hands. The manacles were heavy and securely locked; a chain ran through them and then through the bars of the grate.

"There is not much chance of your getting free of that," spoke Stephen. "What do you say, Roger?"

"It all depends upon the strength of that grate," answered the young sailor. From a small heap of cypress logs he took a billet about two feet in length and of something above the thickness of a fence rail. He balanced it in his hands and continued: "The noise I make is going to alarm the house and we may be forced to run for it, Mr. Mayhew, before we can free you. So it would be well for you to tell us now what you have done

with the cipher which you snatched from the hands of the Marquis of Glastonbury that night last winter."

Lieutenant Mayhew's pale face lighted up and he smiled.

"So you know of that little matter," said he.

In a few words Roger informed him as to who he was and how he came by the information.

"You will be surprised to learn that the paper I snatched from the Marquis that night was not the cipher," said he.

"Not the cipher!"

"No. You see they flogged me until I was no longer able to bear it; then I told them that the parchment was beneath the hall stone. I supposed that they would find nothing there; all I desired was a respite from the frightful pain. When the stone was lifted and Glastonbury seized the paper which lay beneath it, the shock was so great that I could not think clearly. The one idea in mind was that Colonel Randall had changed the hiding place of the document and that I had unwittingly betrayed my country. I could have wept with joy when some hours later I dis-

covered that the parchment was only an old Dutch screed of some sort placed under the hall stone when the house was built."

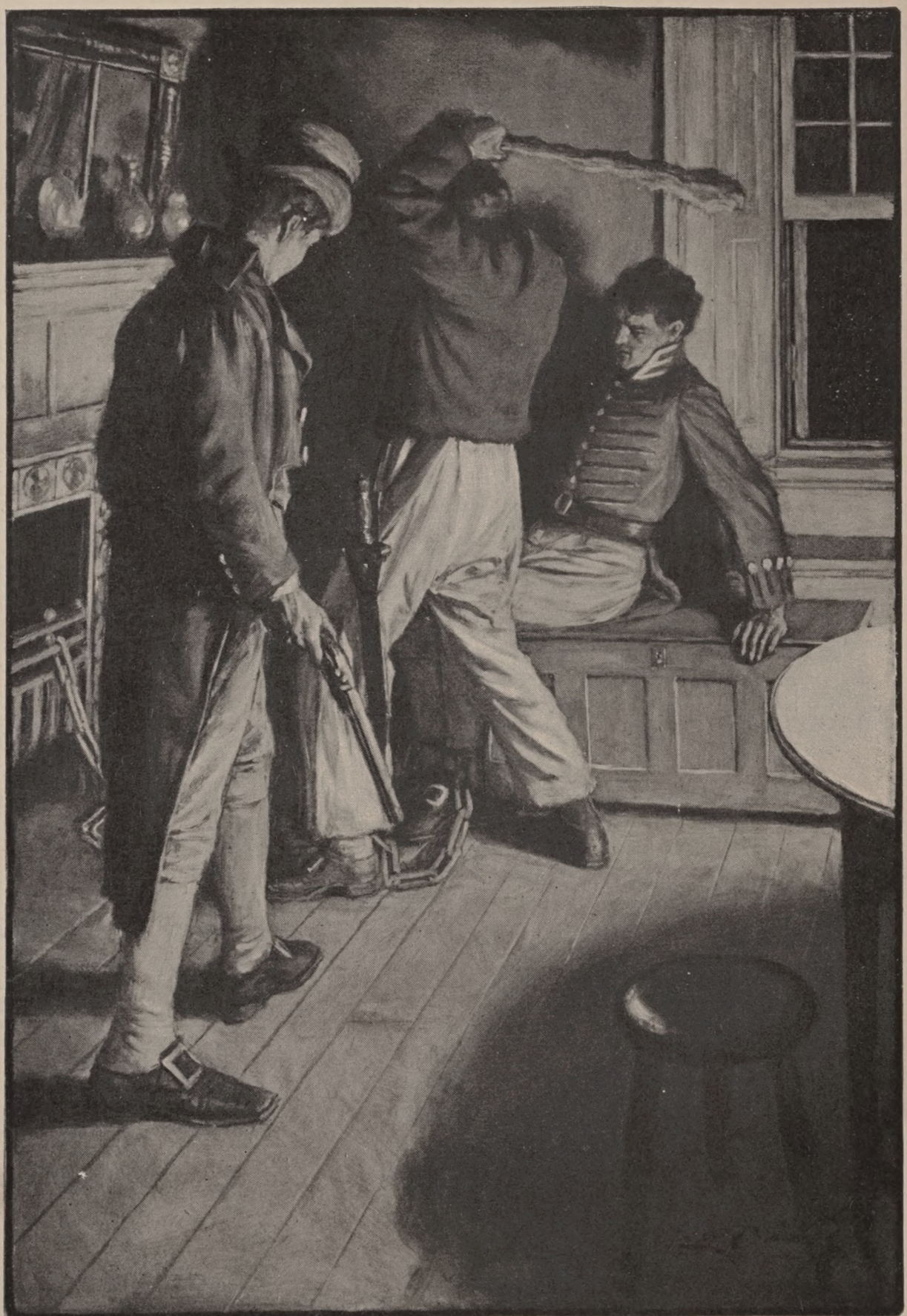
"And the cipher really is ——"

"In the wall over the doorway, of the old stone tower upon the bay shore."

As Mayhew uttered these words there came a dry, cynical laugh; all three turned, and there in the doorway stood the elegant figure of the Marquis of Glastonbury.

"Lieutenant Mayhew," cried he mockingly and with an elaborate gesture of thanks, "your little explanation came in good time. Accept my gratitude. As for you two," turning a sudden look of ferocity upon the youthful Americans, "your power to trouble me is about over. You have placed your heads within the lion's jaws; within ten minutes you'll be swinging from one of the trees outside there."

He took a backward step through the doorway and turned his head as though to call; this movement was fatal to his chances; with the bound of a panther Roger was upon him; the cypress billet whirled through the air and struck him a glancing blow upon the head



HE STRUCK MADLY AT THE HEAVY GRATE

that stretched him bleeding upon the floor. But as he fell a cry of warning pealed from his lips; immediately there came an overturning of chairs and the rush of hasty feet.

Roger with the strength lent him by the situation struck madly at the heavy grate; once, twice, thrice the solid log rose and fell; then the iron casting broke and Mayhew was free of it.

"The window," cried Roger.

One after another they leaped out into the darkness; the last of them was just vanishing from view when a half dozen British officers sprang over the prostrate form of Glastonbury and dashed into the room. A pistol in the hand of the foremost exploded, and the heavy ball whizzed past the heads of the fugitives.

"There they go!" cried he who had fired the shot. "After them!"

"To the shed," cried Roger as he headed Mayhew toward that structure. "We must have mounts!"

A soldier, newly aroused from a deep sleep, judging from the way he fumbled at the lock of his piece, stood in their path when they reached the shed; but a blow from Stephen's

pistol butt effectually disposed of him. There were a number of horses in the building; with the edge of his cutlass Roger freed them, and then drove them forth. The British officers could be heard stumbling forward in the darkness shouting madly in their anger and panic.

"Now, lieutenant," said Roger. With a heave he had hoisted the still manacled young officer into a saddle; then both his and Stephen's weapons barked a sullen warning to their pursuers that they must not press them too close; the echoes had not died away before they were mounted and all three thundering away toward the American lines.

It was dawn when the three adventurers were safely past the first picket of Jackson's army; as they glanced back they saw a sputtering rocket go flaring into the sky; the British were advancing against the American works.

The morning was a misty one, and Roger heard the roll of the kettle drums and the fanfare of trumpets from somewhere off in the thickness. But it was not long before the sun began to stab its way, ray by ray, through the fog, and the compact column of the enemy

could be seen moving steadily forward like some ponderous, gloomy monster bearing doom in its thousand hands.

Mayhew was sent to the rear to have a smith file off the irons; Stephen and Roger went at once to a battery upon a bastion near at hand, and Lieutenant Spotts, commander of the artillery, gave them charge of a gun.

No shot had been fired upon either side as yet, but when his gun was charged, Roger sighted it and Stephen applied the match. As its thunder rolled across the plain the mist lifted like a vast curtain and the entire British force could be seen in motion toward them. It was a magnificent sight and the farmers and backwoodsmen behind the American works gazed at it in admiration and wonder. Such a scene of gorgeous military splendor had never before been witnessed upon an American battle-field.

The thousands of polished musket barrels flashed back the rays of the sun; the bright scarlet coats with white shoulder belts; the grays, the blues, and the waving tartans of the bare legged Highlanders gave the brilliant colors of romance to the attack.

The band of the Battalion d'Orleans behind the works was blaring and throbbing away at "Yankee Doodle"; and as the rattling, stirring notes reached them the Tennessee and creole riflemen, and the Kentucky reserve burst into a storm of cheers.

Jackson, upon a powerful gray charger, rode down the line.

"Hold your fire, men, until you see the whites of their eyes," he shouted, his haggard face aglow with the light of battle.

Again the riflemen cheered. As the general passed, a voice cried out:

"There is a man made by nature for victory. He'll win or die fighting in the last ditch, Mr. Dare."

In surprise Roger turned; there in command of a battery of long guns, manned by a crew of desperate looking bravos, stood Lafitte, smiling and bowing politely.

Before Roger had time to make more than a bare reply the batteries began to speak. The column of General Gibbs reeled and swayed under the murderous fire. But resolutely the gallant Englishman pressed on: lanes were plowed in his compact mass of red coats; but

the gaps were filled up at the stern command "close in." Forward, doggedly and grimly, they came; then at last they were within range of the small arms.

At the first sputtering volley of these latter, Lafitte cried to Roger,

"Let's see how they'll stand that. Those fellows have stormed walled cities before now; but here they are facing men accustomed to the rifle from childhood—the finest shots in the world."

Like a sheet of continuous flame the riflemen poured their fire into the oncoming enemy; as fast as one line would discharge their pieces, they would fall back and another would advance to the edge of the works and do likewise.

For a space the English faced this dreadful fire without flinching, but when within fifty yards of the works they broke and began to fall back. The plain was covered with their dead; the rifles still spat their murderous contents at them; the cannon roared in their faces; from across the river the American batteries began to join in the slaughter.

Generals Gibbs and Packenham rode

among their dismayed followers, white with fury.

"Halt!" shouted Packenham, his voice ringing above the roar of the guns. "Are you Englishmen? Face about, and their works are ours."

As he endeavored desperately to cheer the terror stricken column on, a bullet smashed the bone of his right arm; another killed the horse under him. But he remounted and with his sword in his left hand he cheered on his men.

Once more they advanced—re-formed, supported by the Highlanders.

All this time Roger's gun had been speaking regularly, as had those in the other batteries along the full length of the line. The crashing volleys from the riflemen had continued, and the British were dying in crowds.

General Packenham fell at the head of the oncoming column, as did General Gibbs a little later. This halted the column; the Highlanders continued to advance until their leader, Colonel Dale was killed; then they also wavered and fled in terror, but not until

more than five hundred of their number had been stretched upon the plain.

At other points the splendid army of Britain had met with the same dreadful reverse. The glory of a short half hour before had departed; where all had been pomp and glitter, where brave men had marched to the blare of bugles and under the gay banner of St. George, all was death and horror; the remnants of the defeated and terror-stricken invaders fell back under General Lambert, and New Orleans was saved.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

WHEN it was discovered that General Lambert would not renew the attack, Roger at once prepared the *Spitfire* for a hurried voyage.

"That blow upon the head did not finish the Marquis," he told Stephen, "and you may depend upon it he is even now upon his way north toward Good Ground."

In the darkness of the night the little craft slipped through Admiral Cochrane's fleet and squared away toward the north.

"I have often, during my long illness, thought of that cipher key," said Mayhew to the two lads as they all stood upon the quarter-deck under the quiet southern stars and watched the waters slip by the sides and whirl away into the darkness. "But I somehow fancied that Colonel Randall had turned it over to the war office. We talked of it more than once, and he told me that he intended to do so."

"Did you ever discuss it with him in the presence of your successor as secretary, Ravenac?"

"Yes, once when I visited White Towers. I did not like the man and thought it unsafe to have him know the whereabouts of the document. I persuaded the colonel to change its hiding-place at once."

"Ah!" exclaimed Stephen, with a glance at Roger; "that, then, is what he meant when he cried out that night: 'This is Mayhew's work!'"

Lieutenant Mayhew laughed. "He suspected me of distrusting him, I know. It was less than a week after my visit that he lost his position; and I understand he placed that to my credit, as well.

"When Colonel Randall agreed with me that it would be unsafe to leave the cipher in the secret niche in the library, he asked me what I considered the best place for it," said Mayhew. "I replied that the war office would be the safest in my opinion; but, after that, there was the old stone tower upon the bay shore."

With fair winds behind her the *Spitfire*

drove on through the gulf and out into the open Atlantic; day after day went by and still her bowsprit pointed north; every stitch of canvas that she could carry was spread; the three young men on board felt that it was a sort of race for Good Ground, for who knew what might be occurring there!

While the *Spitfire* plunged toward the north, another ship was sailing, as fast as the winds would drive her, westward, with the news that the war was over. Peace had been signed on December 24th, two weeks previous to the victory at New Orleans!

It was at the close of a wintry day in early February that the *Spitfire's* lookout caught sight of the Long Island shore; complete darkness had settled over all when the brig dropped anchor and a boat was called away.

"The ice is thicker than it was during my last call here in the brig," said Roger, as the boat slowly made its way toward the shore.

When they at last stood upon the frozen bay road and were preparing to trudge through the snow-drifts toward the tower, Stephen suddenly started, and whispered:

"Look there!"

"What is it?" asked Mayhew in the same low tone.

"A light—see, there by the old tower."

A glimmer of light was dancing over the snow, a red, spark-like effect that came and went at intervals.

"It's some one carrying a masked lantern," said Roger, after a moment, "and he seems to be coming this way."

"It may be the Marquis," breathed Stephen.

"Or your friend the man with one arm," put in Mayhew. "He may be still on the ground."

Nearer and nearer came the light flashing, now and then, straight ahead, again being apparently directed to either side.

"Silence, men," warned Roger to the boat's crew. "And get down out of sight until we have made sure who this is."

The men crouched behind a snow bank, where the flitting rays of the oncoming lantern could not reach them; the others did likewise. Now the crunching of footsteps could be heard; in the uncertain rays of the

lantern two figures could be dimly discerned. At length the newcomers reached the road not more than ten yards from the crouching men of the *Spitfire*, and paused.

"It's a long walk in the cold," said one of them, complainingly.

"Ravenac," whispered Roger in Stephen's ear.

"The walk is not the worst of it, my dear Ravenac," said a second voice, beyond a doubt that of the Marquis of Glastonbury. "There is a drive along the wind swept road for a good ten miles after we reach the carriage, and then to sea in an open boat to New London, where we will be safe among the blockading fleet."

Ravenac's teeth chattered loudly.

"It's not a very pleasant prospect," remarked he. "The two winters that I have spent here along this coast, and in these woods, have gotten into my blood, I think. I can never get warm."

The Marquis laughed in his smooth, soft way.

"Oh, well!" he exclaimed. "It's all over at last; you'll have no more night lurkings —no more hunts among the ruins of the old

mansion. What a lucky thing it was that I overheard Mayhew's words on the night of the battle."

Mayhew gripped Roger's arm tightly. Something like a sob of gratitude rose in Stephen's throat. There was a rustling of stiff parchment; then the Marquis continued:

"Hold the lantern nearer, Ravenac!" The Frenchman did as he was told; the dim rays faintly illuminated the smiling face of the Marquis as he bent over a large sheet of parchment and studied it closely.

"Ah," chuckled he, "it's given us many an hour of anxiety—many a laborious search. But here it is at last. The Yankee system of defense is as good as solved." He threw back his head and laughed. "And to think," said he, "that our energetic friends are far away in the South not dreaming of this. Ah, they are courageous boys enough; but they have lost, for all that."

From without the small circle of light cast by the lantern a hand suddenly reached forward and closed upon the parchment.

"Don't be so sure of that," said a quiet voice. In an instant the light rays were

flashed upon the speaker; he stood tall, slim and upright by the roadside, and in his hand he now held a cocked pistol.

"Parker Mason," shrilled Ravenac, in the thin high tone of fear.

But the Marquis of Glastonbury spoke no words; like lightning he leaped forward; the secret service officer's weapon exploded, but the bullet went wide, and in another instant he was upon his back in the snow with the white but powerful hands of the Marquis about his throat.

"My sword, Ravenac," panted the nobleman. "Give it to him between the ribs!"

The frantic Frenchman tore the blade from its sheath; he had drawn back his arm for the deadly thrust when Roger's knee was planted in the small of his back and he was thrown aside among the alert boat's crew who had leaped up at the first movement of their captain.

In another instant the strong hands of Stephen and Mayhew had dragged the Marquis from the prostrate form of Mason. Then Roger lifted the parchment which had fallen upon the snow.

"I'll take care of this," he remarked, quietly.

The Marquis flecked the clinging snow from his garments with a handkerchief, and said in his smoothest tone,

"It is a matter of constant surprise to me, Mr. Dare, how you happen upon me in this regular fashion. Really, I shall at last be forced to go out of my way to dispose of you, for good."

"Mars' Steve! Mars' Steve!" called a joyful voice; and in another moment old Cato came upon the scene and grasped his young master's hands in both his own. "I's pow'ful glad to see yo' back home once mo', sah, 'deed I is."

"And I'm glad to be back, Cato," replied Stephen, as he gave the old servant a hearty grip.

"Your chance discovery would have done you little good, Mr. Mason," observed the Marquis, "had it not been for these," and he included all the others in a graceful wave of the hand.

"I am glad indeed that they happened along," returned Mason. "But mine was no

chance discovery ; Cato and I were watching when you and your accomplice discovered the hiding place of the parchment in the wall of the old tower. We followed you in order to recover it at the first good opportunity."

Cato dragged forward a huge musket at this juncture.

"And only fo' Mars' Steve and dis odder gen'man gettin' in de road, sah," said he to the Marquis, "yo' would hab gone to glory. I was jest drawin' a bead on you when dey all jumped from behind de snow bank."

The two prisoners were at once taken aboard the brig and ironed ; the cipher key was locked in the strong box of the cabin and Starbuck was placed at the door to guard against any possibility of an attempt to secure it.

"What next?" said Stephen as they stood upon deck in the keen wintry wind.

"Mr. Taylor," said Roger by way of reply, "make sail."

"Where away, sir?" asked the first officer when the order had been obeyed and the brig was standing out of the little bay.

"Washington," answered Roger, briefly.

"Good," said the secret service agent, ap-

provingly; "the parchment should be placed in safe hands without delay."

"We-all will be glad to get rid ob it," stated Cato who was hovering about Stephen delightedly. "It's caused a pow'ful lot ob trouble, and dat's a fac'."

The breeze was a good one and the brig made a rapid passage to the Chesapeake and thence up the Potomac. An hour after they had dropped anchor Roger, Stephen and Mayhew stood in the presence of President Madison.

"I am delighted to have possession of this," said the chief magistrate tapping the table with the folded parchment, which Roger had handed him a few moments before. "While its whereabouts was unknown it was a constant perplexity to us—a source of weakness—for we dreaded to attempt to carry out any of Colonel Randall's plans, not knowing but that the British knew as much about them as we did ourselves. However," with a gesture of great satisfaction, "there will be no use for any sort of defense, now, or, I sincerely hope, for many years to come."

Both lads looked at him in astonishment;

and he laughed as he arose to his feet, and said:

"Oh, I had forgotten; the news is not yet given to the public. It has just reached the State Department that peace has been signed with England—and a peace, I hope, which will last forever."

As the two boys left the President's presence they found the passages filled with excited people; throngs were gathering upon street corners, for the good news of the war's end had been just whispered abroad, and all were anxious to learn the truth.

The two lads parted with Mayhew and Mason with sincere expressions of good will; and on the way north Roger set Stephen and Cato ashore at Good Ground.

"My first work," said the young master of White Towers, "will be to restore the old place to its former dignity. And on your next trip in the brig down the coast, I hope you'll find the work well under way."

The man in the bow of the long boat pushed off at Roger's command.

"Give way," ordered the young captain as her nose swung around; and as the sweeps

caught the water, he turned and glanced back at his friend.

"Do away with the secret places, Steve," called he, with a smile.

"Trust me for that," laughed Stephen Randall.

And he and Cato stood upon the bay shore until the boat reached the *Spitfire* and was hoisted in; then the saucy little craft swept about and headed seaward, bound for her home in Casco Bay.

THE END

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THE BOY TARS OF 1812

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